

Editorial

When I heard that Bill Hybels of Willowcreek fame was to be conducting two conferences in Edinburgh over the winter 1997/98, I resolved to attend and hear for myself what he had to say. I was glad I went, not least because it gave me an insight into the earnest desire of hundreds of ministers to learn something to their advantage. To put it another way, I was astonished at how many ministers attended both of the day conferences, self-evidently in the hopes of being let into some of the secrets which hold the key to the Willowcreek 'miracle'.

I don't want to offer anything like a critique of Willowcreek in this editorial, but I will allow myself just two comments on what I heard. First, Hybels is undoubtedly a brilliant communicator—an hour and a half seemed like a mere fifteen minutes. Second, what he was communicating ought to be well known and accepted by every minister and congregation in the land. His two day seminars on leadership were of the basic stuff of Christian ministry. (I should perhaps add that at neither conference did he make more than passing reference to the Willowcreek model of church life.)

I mention this because it seems clear to me that the editorial of a journal on Christian ministry can hardly ignore the hunger of so many hundreds to learn about models of church life. Let

me therefore share a little of what I have learned over the years about barriers to congregational growth in our churches today.

Confusion

We ought to be able to take it as axiomatic for our readers that expository preaching is absolutely central in building a congregation. Unfortunately, there is much confusion in some minds about the true nature of expository preaching. Far too many pulpits continue to be characterised by expositions which are little more than explanations of the text. Such (usually tedious) displays of pulpit exegesis are not real preaching at all. The message must be applied to mind, but also to will and emotions. Bridges must be built between the 'then and there' of the text—what it *meant*—and the 'here and now' of late 20th-century daily living—what it *means*. It is this relevant, vital application which is too often missing.

However, with that understanding of expository preaching, we insist that the centrality of the proclamation of the Gospel and the whole counsel of God cannot and must not be questioned.

Modernity

The profound tragedy of much church life today is that many congregations have become 'cities of refuge' for those

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seeking to escape post-modernity.¹ Our society is now characterised by a 'pick 'n mix' attitude to life. The younger generations no longer want to make firm, faithful commitments to any of the traditional institutions—whether trade unions, political parties, rotary clubs, church membership or even marriage. They want 'to feel comfortable' (detestable phrase!) with what they choose to do.

Already in its death-throes, modernity was characterised by well-organised institutions. That is one reason why the average age of church-goers is so high. Daily life is now confusing and disturbing for the

attitude. It is that God is a God of change. The Hebrew slaves in Egypt became desert nomads in Sinai, who then became hill farmers in Palestine, who then built cities and lived in stone houses. They first worshipped in a moveable 'tent' sanctuary, but it was replaced by Solomon's temple whose glory became legendary. Were these not major changes planned and inspired by God?

The Christian faith is based on a new life, a second birth, in which the old passes away and the new becomes reality. Believers are exhorted constantly to be putting off the old nature and putting on the new as they are renewed continually in the spirit of their minds. Surely, we of all people ought to be able to cope with the new. Our God is the Eternal Contemporary.

Yet too many cling to traditions which have nothing to do with the essence of the Gospel or the church's life. Far more of our Christianity than we realise belongs to cultural accretions which have little or no warrant in Scripture. It takes a few months in a totally different culture such as that of India to realise that westernism is by no means synonymous with Christianity.

Those who are thoroughly grounded in the pure Word of God ought to be able to make the distinction between changes that are bad, changes that are good and changes that are neutral. A moment's reflection will soon produce examples of all three. A *bad change*, for example, would be to introduce into public worship a regular reading from a contemporary philosopher. (I know a church where that was done!) A *good change* might be to move from the 1899 Church Hymnary to the 1927 Revised Church Hymnary! (I know a congregation which in 1974 did just that when the local crematorium invested in the new Church Hymnary

Third Edition 1973, and gave away all the 1927 books.) A *neutral change* might be to move the congregational notices to the middle of the service instead of having them at the beginning.

Generally speaking, dying congregations refuse to make good changes. They hold on to vain traditions which are leading them into an advanced stage of decay. These are the venerable institutions whose primary focus is to maintain things as they are, as they have been, and as they evermore shall be. 'This is the way we do it here,' is the oft repeated refrain at committee meetings. They become old curiosity shops, visited either by tourists and antiquarians or else by no one at all.

But dying congregations can also make bad changes in frantic efforts to find some solution to their malaise. A church in Ottawa tried this, so they must try it too. Someone on holiday in Florida saw a new way of celebrating communion, so they must try that out as well. A recent book recommended experimenting with evening services—it's worth a try since only a handful attend our evening service anyway.

Tight-rope walkers

Most pastors know the problem of trying to maintain a broad consensus in the congregation. The refugees from post-modernity still have real spiritual needs and do need a sense of security. On the other hand, parents with growing families are eager for 'body-life' in the church that will relate the Christian faith to daily living in the world of today's teenagers. Keeping one's balance in such a situation demands wisdom, discernment and gracious leadership.

It is not easy to show the traditionalists in our ranks that certain progressive changes are completely in

too many cling to traditions which have nothing to do with the essence of the Gospel or the church's life

elderly—what is the world coming to?—so the orderly, familiar church service with its hymn-prayer sandwich offers comfort and a safe haven from the threatening waves and surging currents of the seas of post-modernity.

At a recent elders' training conference, the attitude of many of those nurtured under modernity was forcefully expressed by one man who rose to say his piece: 'In our church we have the finest of traditions which it is our duty to defend at all costs.' He was telling his fellow-elders that his congregation was his 'city of refuge' from the uncertainties of a changing world.

Change and decay

I have a huge problem with that man's

harmony with the Bible's teaching. Neither is it easy to teach young people that some things going on in a neighbouring congregation are unhelpful and to be avoided at all costs. Parents can sometimes lose a sense of proportion in their desire to see changes that might possibly keep their children interested! We have to keep in perspective the Gospel truth that there is much in our Christian faith which cuts straight through our modern culture and that those who would follow Christ must learn obedience to him and be prepared for painful sacrifice.

A sense of belonging

Are there changes which post-modernity has brought and to which Christian leaders should rightly be responding? One very obvious change is the new emphasis on 'where I belong'. A few decades ago, people chose a church only for what it taught. No longer is that so. The typical post-modern person wants also *to belong*. The institutional model—with its well-organised, traditional service where people sit in neat, inflexible rows as they attend a tightly controlled order of proceedings dominated by one person—can fail completely to bring that all important sense of belonging. Far more attractive to the 'post-modern' is the house-church model, where those who gather sit in an informal circle, share a meal together and quickly bond into a close family group where every member has an accepted place.

Which of the two models answers most nearly to the impression of the early church given in the Acts and Epistles? I suspect that Paul with his background of the synagogue as well as his missionary church planting of new fellowships which met in homes would be able to relate to both. But I

also suspect that he would want some pretty sweeping changes in the institutional model as it presents itself in too many of our congregations. Our late chairman, William Still, saw clearly three decades ago that a sense of 'belonging' was vital to a congregation's well-being. Thus he stripped out the pews in the church building, replacing them with chairs, to enable his members to relate to each other on the horizontal level as well as relating to God in the vertical in worship.

Courageous discernment

Donald Carson has declared that post-modernity is the greatest revolution in the western world since the enlightenment. We cannot hide our heads in the sand. Without compromising one iota of the Bible's message, leaders in the church must have the courage and discernment to declare the whole counsel of God in a cultural context where the fading vestiges of modernity will neither obscure the grace of God nor distract from the glory of Christ.

If that means gutting Victorian church halls, laying carpets, providing seating in armchairs, providing something to eat and using a guitar to lead the worship instead of a pipe organ—so be it. If the Word is being faithfully taught and if lives are being transformed, surely our Lord is seeing the travail of his soul and being satisfied.

Those who have the responsibility to lead the worship of God's people can do a great deal to encourage and foster the sense that those gathered are a family. One does not need to descend into the banality of joke-cracking or silly off-the-cuff remarks which detract from the solemnity and reverence of Divine Service. Rather the leader must be acutely conscious that this is a 'family gathering', and treat seriously

'family matters' as they occur. The marriage of a member, a golden wedding, the death of a loved one, the gift of a child—these and other events can be incorporated into the service along with many other informal touches which create that sense of 'togetherness' so vital for any 'family'. Ministers and pastors must consciously work at moulding the fellowship into a close-knit family where mutual loving care is always evident. 'Others will know you are my disciples when you love one another.'

A final word. While one is bound to marvel at the heroism of the musicians who continued to play as the

dying congregations hold on to vain traditions which are leading them into an advanced stage of decay

Titanic sank in those icy waters, I myself would prefer to be among those manning the lifeboats and helping to transfer as many as possible to another ship that was not sinking. The church against which the gates of hell will not prevail doesn't necessarily have a denominational tag fixed to it; nor a 19th-century culture; nor need it be singing 18th-century hymns. Rather will it be marked by holiness of living, faithful biblical teaching and a passion for God which expresses itself in sharing Christ's love in a way that draws others to him.

Endnote

- 1 For an explanation of Postmodernity see Dominic Smart's two articles in the *Rutherford Journal of Church & Ministry*, Vols 4.1 and 4.2, Spring & Winter 1997.

In Honour of the Son

The second in a series of three articles on the Trinity

Eugene Peterson

Whenver Christians come together for worship, they meet in honour of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, they meet in honour of the Holy Trinity. But we believers do not meet to discuss the Trinity—an exercise that often turns into a dazzling display of intellectual acrobatics for a few and turns the rest of us into spectators. No, we meet to honour the Holy Trinity, which in the Christian faith means adoring with the intent of participating.

Trinity is sometimes supposed to be the most abstruse and intellectual of church doctrines, the most removed from what we are wont to call 'real living'. But in fact it is the most practical, having to do with all the day-

to-day issues that face us as individuals, congregations and denominations from the time we get out of bed in the morning until we fall asleep at night.

And here's the reason: God the Father reveals himself in Jesus the Son by the Holy Spirit; in Jesus and only in Jesus, we know God as he reveals himself as Lord and Saviour. But the meaning of Jesus is the Father; and the means by which we know Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Our lives are determined and find their meaning in this revelation. Everything God is and does and everything we are and do, personally and corporately, is accounted for by this revelation.

The concept of Trinity is the church's attempt to preserve and protect God's revelation of himself in

all its parts and relationships. And a most useful and practical work it has been. At a most practical level it prevents us from getting involved in highly religious but soul-destroying ways of going about things.

The first thing it does is prevent us from reducing God to something simple that we can, as we say, 'get a handle on'—reducing God to what we need at the moment or see as useful in the present crisis. The minute we 'get a handle on God' we find that we have hold, not of God, but an idol. There is always more to God and his ways than we know or need. Trinity is our best defence against reductionism.

The second practicality of the Trinity is that it demonstrates that God exists in personal relationship and therefore

can only be known in personal relationship. We cannot know God in any other way than the way in which he reveals himself, that is, relationally. God cannot be known as true idea or a righteous cause or a private experience. We cannot know God simply by thinking hard of him, or by working hard for him, or by shutting ourselves up in a room free of all distractions and meditating on him. God exists in personal relationship and he can only be known as he is—personally, relationally. The Trinity is our best defence against de-personalising God.

The Trinity is of particular use to Christians in times of confusion. In desperate times we are tempted to go for the quick answer and the efficient solution. The quick answer is almost always an oversimplified answer, leaving out all the complexities of actual truth; the efficient solution is almost always a depersonalised solution for persons take a lot of time and endless trouble. Trinity keeps us in touch with the immense largeness of God and the immediate personalness of God. Honouring the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the most important thing we can do to keep our lives large and personal during these times when the devil is using every strategy he can come up with to make us small and mean.

Honouring the Son

Exploring the Neighbourhood of History

In honouring the Father we look around the neighbourhood and are struck by sheer profusion of life—the life of a rose in blossom, a red-tailed hawk in flight, a cat on the prowl, but

mostly human life: every baby born a fresh witness to a mystery that ever eludes us but never, if we take the time for it, fails to put us on our knees in adoration. Every time a baby is born our lives open up with more life. When Jesus was born God's life was proclaimed and preached in our lives.

But we are not on our knees in adoration very long before we find that everything is not wonderful. The lovely baby, our primary and most emphatic experience of the Father's work of creating of life, cries, gets sick, interrupts our sleep, invades our comfortable routines. And then begins to grow and turns into a disobedient, defiant brat: he refuses to eat what we prepared for supper; she leaves her room a mess. It's not long before we are having headaches and sleepless nights over this child that just a few days ago we were cuddling in our arms.

If the world is so wonderful, if life is so amazing, why all this trouble, this mess? We pick up this lovely apple and bite into it, and then find that there is a worm in the apple. We have moved from creation which evokes adoration to history which requires salvation.

I had a delayed but abrupt introduction to the world of history. I grew up in a Christian home with good parents. I was told the story of Jesus and instructed in the right way to live. I was loved and treated well. In my memory it was a fair approximation of the garden of Eden—a good and wonderful creation. Life.

And then I went off to school and discovered history—that the world was in a bad way. This knowledge came into my life in the person of Cecil Zachary. Cecil was the school bully and by about my third day in the first grade he discovered me and made me his year long project! I had been taught in Sunday School not to fight and so had

never learned to use my fists. I had been prepared for the wider world of neighbourhood and school by learning 'Bless those who persecute you' and 'Turn the other cheek.' I don't know how Cecil Zachary knew that about me, some sixth sense that bullies have, I suppose, but he picked me for his sport. Most afternoons after school he would catch me and beat me up. He also found out that I was a Christian and taunted me with that—called me a Jesus-sissy. I would try to find alternative ways home, but he stalked me and caught me.

I loved going to school, learning so much, finding friends, adoring my

*blood spurted from his
nose, a lovely crimson
on the snow*

teacher. The classroom was a wonderful place. But soon after the dismissal bell I had to face Cecil Zachary and get my daily beating.

After several months of this—it was March and the winter snow was still on the ground but melting—Cecil caught up with me one evening as a bunch of us were walking home and took me on. Something happened within me, it was totally uncalculated. For just a moment the Bible verses disappeared from my consciousness and I grabbed him. To my surprise, and his, I realised that I was stronger than him. I wrestled him to the ground, sat on his chest and pinned his arms with my knees. There he was, helpless under me. It was too good to

be true. I hit him in the face with my fists. It felt good and I hit him again—blood spurted from his nose, a lovely crimson on the snow. By this time all the other children were cheering, egging me on. I said to Cecil, ‘Say “Uncle.”’ He wouldn’t say it. I hit him again. More blood. More cheering. And then my Christian training reasserted itself. I said, ‘Say, “I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour.”’ And he said it.

Cecil Zachary was my first Christian convert.

Cecil Zachary was also my introduction to history. Creation is wonderful, but History is a mess. God

provides the fundamental datum that something isn’t working the way it was intended, and that we have every right to expect something other and better.

The Kerygma of History

The Death of Jesus

We have seen that the birth of Jesus provides our entrance into the reality and meaning of creation. He shows us that the creation is something to be lived, not looked at, and the way he did it becomes the way we do it.

In a parallel way, the death of Jesus provides our entrance into the mess of history—this round of newspaper headlines, failed plans, disappointed relations, political despair, murder and mayhem, accident and sickness. Jesus shows us that history, this mess we find ourselves in, is something to be entered and embraced, not studied and analysed, and the way he did it becomes the way we do it.

The death of Jesus is the centrepiece for encountering this fundamental violation of life, this sacrilege visited on creation. We begin to deal with the ‘what’s wrong’ with the world at the place where the Gospel deals with it: Jesus dead and buried.

The death of Jesus confirms and validates our experience that there is, in fact, something terribly wrong, and that this wrong is not simply a logical working out, cause-effect, of the way things are. Jesus, born of a virgin, dies on a cross—there is no logic, physical or spiritual, between those two clauses.

Jesus suffering, recorded in his laments and tears and death, therefore becomes the gospel text for finding our place in history—this history that seems to be so much at variance with what is given and promised in the creation

itself, in the life abundant all around us.

Jesus suffered and died. That is the plot that provides the structure of the gospel story. Our four gospel writers, each in his own way, write the story of Jesus’ passion—his suffering and death—and provide it with an extended introduction. The passion story takes place in one week, but it is given space far out of proportion to its chronology. Matthew gives a quarter of his pages to the passion; Mark a third; Luke a fifth; and John almost one half. It was to tell this story, Jesus’ suffering and death, that the evangelists wrote their gospels. Each gospel writer does the extended introduction in his own way, but when it comes to this core material, they all write it pretty much the same way. This is important, suffering and death repeated four times—we need to know that this happened and how and why it happened. Far more extensively than in any other part of the story of Jesus, we are supplied with details. We are intended to get in on this and we need to know exactly what it is we are getting in on.

The pivotal text in St John’s Gospel (which opens with Jesus’ birth, stating that the eternal Word became flesh) is at the near centre. Jesus has just ignored the request of some visiting Greek tourists for an interview and announces his death: ‘Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ (12:24). He then says, and this is the pivotal sentence to the story of salvation, ‘Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour.” No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’ (12:27-28) Jesus stands at the brink of death; there is still time and opportunity to pull back, avoid the

moralism uses God in order not to need God any longer

made everything good, but early on men and women began making a mess of it and haven’t quit. Being a Christian means discovering the wonder and beauty of life; it also means being discovered by Cecil Zachary and finding that not everyone thinks my life is so wonderful. We are plunged into pain and disappointment and suffering. Sometimes it recedes for awhile, other times it threatens to overwhelm us.

The final verdict on all this is death. We die. And, strangely, virtually every death, even of the very old, feels like an intrusion, and more or less surprises us. Tears and lament bear witness to our basic sense that this is wrong, and that we don’t like it one bit. Death

abyss, side-step the suffering. He considers it; should he pray for a divine last minute reprieve from death? No, he prays instead, 'Father, glorify thy name.'

The word 'glorify' catches our attention. It seemed to fit the account of his birth when John wrote, 'we beheld his glory...' But this is going to involve a terrible death—glory? We are alerted to look for the God in an unexpected way, the goodness and salvation of God spilling out of an unlikely container. And that is in fact what happens: this death becomes the centre of our understanding and experience of salvation—the help we need to get through what has gone wrong in and around us.

Our Scriptures are full of this death language: the passion stories spill over into the epistles and the apocalypse. We are somehow or other going to die. There is no avoiding this: this is fundamental. Paul contracts the whole scheme of God's working in our lives to this and only this: 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor.2:2).

Dishonouring the Son

Moralism

But however much we admire Jesus, and however many hymns we write and sing about the death of Jesus, however many years we repeat the cycle of Lent and Holy Week in our churches, this death talk doesn't go down well with us. We can't avoid it in our preaching and hymnody and calendars, but we do manage to find ways to dodge it in the way we live. And every time we avoid it we dishonour the Son.

The most common way we in the Christian community have of avoiding or marginalizing Jesus' death is by

constructing a way of life that is safe and secure. We have a lot of information on how to live rightly before God. The Ten Commandments provide the classic structure for living the way we are supposed to live. And we have considerable stores of wisdom accumulated through the Christian centuries on how to conduct our lives decently and pray effectively. We have heavy commitments to teaching our children and others 'line upon line, precept upon precept' what God requires of us.

When things go wrong, whether at home or in society, in church or in government, it is often easy to find a moral reason: disobedience or ignorance of the biblical commandments is obviously at the root of a lot of what is wrong with the world. If we can only educate our people in right thinking and right behaviour, things would improve dramatically.

All this is true enough.

But the moment this becomes our basic orientation to dealing with what is wrong with the world, we have turned our backs on the cross of Christ, on Jesus as our Saviour. The moment this becomes our way of life we dishonour the Son.

I am going to use this *moralism* to designate this dishonouring. But note the word carefully. The root of it is moral, a glorious and necessary word. Morality is built into reality as deeply and inescapably as atoms and protons and neutrons. We are moral beings to the core—the universe is moral. Right and wrong and the freedom involved in choosing between them are embedded in the creation. It matters what is done, said, believed, even thought. Morality is fundamental and non-negotiable.

But moralism is something quite different. Moralism means con-

structing a way of life in which I have no need of a saving God. Moralism works off of a base of human ability and arranges life in such a way that my good behaviour will guarantee protection from punishment or disaster. Moralism works from strength, not weakness. Moralism uses God (or the revelation of God) in order not to need God any longer. Moral codes are used as stepping stones to independence from God.

Moralism works from the outside: it imposes right behaviour on oneself or others. There is no freedom in it, and no joy. Moralism is a moral grid that is set on life—I know exactly where

sacrifice never seems to show up on anyone's Myers-Briggs profile

I fit or don't fit, what actions are right and which are wrong. And once I know that, what else is there? I either do it or don't. Simple.

And of course, once we embark on this course there is no longer any need for Jesus and his cross except in a symbolic way. If what's wrong with the world is simply getting everyone involved in good behaviour, we don't need salvation anymore, we need education and training, political reforms and a cultural renaissance, more information and more power.

The word sacrifice is used over and over in our Scriptures and theology to define what took place on the cross of Jesus. The word gets its content from centuries of Hebrew practice. Sacrifice

begins with material: we bring something to the altar representative of our lives; and we bring our best—flour, grain, lambs, goats, bulls, incense, etc. Once placed on the altar it is no longer ours, we release ownership. We bring our best to God, but we bring it because our best hasn't been good enough; we are sinners and need help. We give ourselves (represented in our offerings) to God to see what he will do with us. This is the best we could do—we are ready now for what God will do. A priest, acting on behalf of God, then burns the offering and it is transformed before our eyes into fragrance and smoke,

***Self-promotion and self-help
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visibly ascending to God. Death, giving up control and ownership, becomes the stuff of transformation. The priest declares an acceptable offering—our lives accepted, forgiven and pleasing to God. God uses the stuff of our sins to save us from our sins. And 'Jesus became sin for us.'

We considered in the first article how easy and common it is to dishonour the Father. God reveals himself in the birth of Jesus to affirm life and all that is involved in life, and get us involved in it. But there are people who only want to pick out the convenient parts and discard the rest—'gnostic' is our shorthand term for them.

It is also common and easy to

dishonour the Son. God reveals himself in the death of Jesus as embracing all that has gone wrong in life and by means of that sacrificial death, saves the world and along the way gets us involved in the salvation. But there are people who want to stand aloof from the mess and clean it up at arms length by hiring some teachers and posting some regulations—'moralist' is our shorthand term for them.

**Cultivating the Honour
of God the Son**

The Christian community is never going to give up teaching moral behaviour, giving instruction in the commandments of Moses and the imperatives of Jesus and the exhortations of Paul. But however important they are, they are not the centre. We cultivate the honour of God the Son by following Jesus to the cross.

The one word that expresses this most succinctly is 'sacrifice'. When we are faced with the enormous wrong that is in the world around and within us we respond by cultivating a life of sacrifice.

For a people like us, trained in a culture of getting things done (pragmatism) and taking care of ourselves (individualism), this doesn't seem at all obvious, but neither does it seem attractive. There is nothing about a life of sacrifice that appeals to our well-intentioned desire to make a difference in the wrong-doing in the world and to make things better for neighbours and ourselves.

When we realise how bad things are in this God-blessed world, we quite naturally want to pitch in and help clean up the mess. We look around

for something to do. We look for some tools or strategies or programmes to reform and renovate and renew. In the process of looking around we happen to look at Jesus. He is the One who was sent to save the world from destruction and doom. The Christian church is agreed that history pivots on him. In Jesus and only in Jesus is the salvation of the world.

We watch him with heightened interest: what exactly did he do? Well, he sacrificed his life on the cross of Calvary. Our gospel witnesses make it clear that his death was no accidental miscarriage of Roman justice, no cruel Greek tragic fate that inexorably overtook him. Jesus embraced it as his vocation, telling his disciples well beforehand: 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mk.10:45). He prepared them and us meticulously as he approached the high moment of sacrifice, three times telling them that he was going to suffer and be rejected and be killed (Mk.8:31, 9:31, 10:34). 'What shall I say—Father—save me?...now glorify thy name.' He also said he would rise again, but that would come later.

Three times Jesus plainly told them what he was doing. At the last minute he also prayed three times to the Father to provide another way of salvation for the world. But there was no other way. 'This is the way; walk ye in it!' And when through that night of Gethsemane prayer... it became as clear to him as he had already made it to his disciples, that there were no alternatives, he agreed to give himself as the sacrifice for 'us and for our salvation'. He gave himself as the sacrifice that would set the world's wrongs right.

St Paul, the definitive preacher and interpreter of Jesus, knew no other way.

He took the cross of Christ as the text for his life and ministry. 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor.2:2). As he looked over his life retrospectively, while writing to the Philippians, he was content to stay in the same track, 'sharing in his [Christ's] suffering by becoming like him in his death' (Phil.3:10).

It was precisely this vocation that he invited his disciples to take up: 'if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me' (Mk.8:34).

I don't know of any part of the Christian gospel that is more difficult to move from the pages of sacred Scripture and our honoured volumes of theology into the assumptions and practices of our everyday Christian lives. Very few among us would dissent from what Jesus said, what Paul wrote, what Calvin preached, and yet—and yet when it comes down to actual assent, we more often than not find another way. We begin our morning prayers with Jesus, 'Father, with you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet...' (Mk.14:36). And our 'yet...' trails off and instead of completing Jesus' prayer ('not what I want but what you want') we begin entertaining other possibilities. If all things are possible for the Father, perhaps there is another way to do something about what is wrong with the world, another way other than a sacrificial life by which I can help out and make things better. In the jargon of the day, we pray 'sacrifice is not one of my gifts—I want to serve God with my strength, with my giftedness.' It's a strange thing, but sacrifice never seems to show up on anyone's Myers-Briggs profile.

But the self-promotion and self-help ways of salvation, so popular among us, do nothing but spiral us further into

the abyss. There is no other way but sacrifice. Annie Dillard, one of our unconventional but most passionate theologians, is blunt in her verdict: 'a life without sacrifice is abomination.' (*Holy the Firm*, p.72)

I am not calling into question anyone's sincerity in this business. But I am reminding you that we have two thousand years of history documenting the failure of good intentions in the work of salvation. There is only one gospel way to do this—to live a sacrificial life in Jesus' name.

The trouble with a word like sacrifice is that it so easily blurs into generalities. It is a grand word and quickly smothered in the welter of telephone calls, committee meetings, job assignments, political urgencies. But there is a way to keep it in focus, simple and accessible, and that way is hospitality.

Hospitality is the gospel way to keep sacrifice local and immediate: a meal prepared and served to family and guests is a giving up of ourselves for another. We all have daily opportunities to be on both the giving and receiving ends of a sacrificial life, to see how it works, to observe the emotions and effects. Isn't it quite significant how much of Jesus' ministry is revealed to us in the context of a meal? Preparing and cooking, serving and eating a meal are activities that underlie participation in the work of salvation.

The form the church uses to cultivate this life of sacrifice among us is Holy Communion: a meal (hospitality!) which draws us into the sacrifice of Christ and nurtures a sacrificial life among us. At the Lord's Table we are at the place of sacrifice, Jesus' sacrifice. We deliberately set ourselves obediently and expectantly in God's presence in order that our lives

become formed sacrificially. Just as the Lord's Day provides a regular protected time for cultivating the attentiveness and adoration that honours God the Father, the Lord's Supper is our primary setting for cultivating a life of sacrifice and hospitality in honour of God the Son. The intent is that everything in our lives that takes place as we leave the Lord's Table will be informed and shaped by what takes place at the Table. There is a saying among cooks and gourmets, 'What you eat is what you are.' That is never more true than when we receive the life of Jesus in the bread and wine of the Holy Supper.

*we all have daily opportunities
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Train the Child

The second in a series of articles taken from a book originally written in 1956 by Annie Torrance

To sincere Christians the act of becoming parents is not unlike being commissioned in the army, for they are called into the service of the King of kings and his Kingdom. The privilege of training, guiding and bringing little children to him is not just 'child's play', and is certainly no light task. There is no 'off duty' in this service. It is a round-the-clock work of twenty-four hours, for the most part. It is indeed comparable to the call to be a foreign missionary. The Gospel is to be lived and made known, if there are to be results. It requires great sacrifice and devoted service. The Lord did not say 'go and play in my vineyard', but 'go and labour in my vineyard'. No work for God can ever be entirely easy, for before long in one way or another, we shall realise that there is an enemy who will try to work havoc wherever he finds an opportunity.

Forming a child's character

It is helpful to recognise that the vocation of parenthood is not to be regarded as a lesser Call to service than that to other spheres of Christian work, and that it means much to God and his heavenly Kingdom, and to mankind. For those who accept the training and the gift of a child as God's

call and trust, there are great rewards, joys and compensations.

This can be especially the case during the pre-school years and it is here that we have wonderful opportunities in helping to shape the mental outlook that does so much to form the character of the child. More than is generally realised they can be taught in these formative years in ways which will make life easier for the children later on. Doubtless many of us look back with regret to those precious years and wonder if we made the best use of them.

Entrusted with his lambs

The simile of a shepherd and his sheep, used so much by God to enable us to understand heavenly things, is surely one of the loveliest and most appropriate. How stupid a flock of sheep can be! If one takes fright they all take fright, and fall into a panic, running here and there, tumbling over each other, none knowing the cause. What one does they all do. They need a shepherd. So it is with us. We are all like sheep; 'we have all gone astray'. But the Chief Shepherd has made ample provision. How comforting to us all that he still says, 'I am the Good Shepherd and give my life for the sheep.'

All Christian parents are his under-shepherds and are entrusted by the Chief Shepherd with the lambs—his lambs. Therefore the parents must be vigilant too. We are reminded that there is such a thing as the wolf who seeks to destroy both sheep and lambs, scattering them as far away from the Shepherd as possible. No matter how much we may try to forget sin, and try to ignore it and turn our backs on its undesirable reality, nevertheless it is apt to dog our steps, subtly and invisibly no doubt, but showing itself in unexpected quarters—and little children are not immune.

The lesson of obedience

One of the earliest lessons every child should be taught is that of obedience. It was God's first lesson to our first parents. Obedience was to be the prime law by which fellowship with God and the supreme happiness of mankind were to be maintained, while disobedience meant the loss and the Fall of man. It was the first lesson and it is the last. Disobedience is rebellion against God and his laws. It is the root of all sin.

This lesson of obedience well learned is the secret of a happy Christian life, and it is no less the secret

Mrs Annie Torrance, mother of the Very Revd Prof. T.F. Torrance, the Revd Prof. James Torrance, and the Revd David Torrance, must have been a most remarkable woman. Wife of a CIM missionary, she stayed in Scotland to bring up her three sons and three daughters while her husband returned to China to complete the work he and his wife had earlier begun—surely an immense sacrifice for both parents. The success of Annie Torrance’s method of training her children may be seen in the remarkable record now evident into the third generation of the wider Torrance family which continues to enrich the Church with outstanding service. We are immensely grateful to Prof. T. F. Torrance and the family for permission to publish a series of extracts from the book their mother wrote.

of a child’s contented and happy life. It is far more important than many parents seem to regard it. It may not be too much to say that the root of most of the trouble met among teenagers lies here. One sometimes hears it said, ‘Oh, the child is too young to understand; when the time comes we will teach him then.’ Alas, that is generally too late. It is difficult to root out of a child the proneness to disobedience once he has begun to acquire the habit of doing as he pleases.

Children of the first Adam

No child comes into the world a perfect human being. All, even little children, are the children of the first Adam, with the same inclinations and the same seeds of death within them. The heart of a child is not different. Surely, then, there are good reasons why obedience should be taught and insisted on at a very early age. God expects it from every Christian parent. If we truly love our children and have their souls’ salvation at heart, we shall certainly be on the alert to teach them God’s first steps to himself. Children can only learn about God in their earliest years through their parents.

Some Christian parents seem to take so much for granted, and decide that

everything will come right through prayer. If they are engaged in Christ’s work and service they may conclude that God will take care of their children! But God expects us not only to pray, but to do all we can on our part, and especially to follow his teaching in regard to training the children he has given into our care.

We recall how Eli grieved the Spirit of God over his sons. God brought judgement on him ‘because they had made themselves vile and he restrained them not’. His love for his sons, or his fear of offending them, seemed to have been greater than his love for God.

The ignoring of wrongdoing also does harm to the child. Real love both to God and to the child will not shrink from correction at the right time and place, and it will not count the cost of offending or being deflected by fear.

Of course some people do not recognise any tendency to wrong in a child. They think it rather ‘cute’, and others think the child is too young and innocent to understand. Experience will show that the slightest misdeed is far better dealt with before it has time to get established. It is much easier to tell a child right at the beginning of these things, than wait until repeated wrongdoing calls for sterner measures,

and the child puts up a strong resistance when the parent attempts to correct him.

Overcoming untruthfulness

The sin that accompanies disobedience is the telling of an untruth. Somehow they go together. Parents may have a horrible dread of their child becoming untruthful, yet gloss over the lack of obedience. Did not our first parents try to cover up their disobedience with a lie?

All kinds of subterfuges take place when lies and disobedience have gained a grip. It fills the juvenile courts, it spreads misery among the nations and breeds distrust the world over. Yet, where does it begin? In the tiny seed of a tiny heart, which all too easily many parents fail to detect until, having taken deep root downward it begins to bear fruit upward, and it has become hard to counteract. It is an important part of our call and our responsibility to God to see to it that disobedience and untruthfulness are overcome.

‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ These words may sound old fashioned today, but they seem to be effective. What a child has thoroughly learned in the early years

will remain, if only in the remote crevices of the heart and mind or memory, and they will rise to the surface again in times of desperate need.

Parents cannot measure the work they do while their children are young, if they teach and train them in the ways the Lord has commanded.

Distorted childhood

Many people consult their children at a far too early age. Children of two or three years old are asked if they would like to do this or that, to go here or there. That would be quite right a few years later but not at this stage. Much

one of the earliest lessons every child should be taught is that of obedience

difficulty may be traced back to this fatal mistake. Young children cannot be expected to know what is best for them to choose, and it is putting power into their hands which they just do not know how to use. The serious thing about it is that they are being given the status of adults while still children, and in the effort to rise to the situation childhood is distorted and distressed. The growth and education of the mind of the child should be gradual, and vital lessons learned step by step. Maybe some people find it an easy way of getting round the requirement of obedience, but it can have very undesirable results.

When young children are consulted and left to make a choice of their own,

the chances are that it will start a whole course of difficulties that will continually crop up. They will soon realise that here is something that they can do just as they like. They are likely to choose what their parents do not want them to choose and they know it. But it has given them a power to act alone, and whether they choose what they really like will not be so important to them as the power of self-determination. This will of course have to come later on but in its proper time. If allowed now, they will go from the smaller things to the greater and develop a defiant attitude of mind.

Is not a large amount of youth delinquency due to the distorted child-adult age we live in? It would appear that in most cases today the youth have never learned to obey or submit to parents from very early years. The astonishing thing is that many parents think their children should not be controlled in case it upsets them!

It is a temptation to take the easier way and turn a blind eye when a child disobeys. It takes effort and patience to be always on the job. One is tempted to give it up and give in. But if one insists on a line of obedience ninety-nine times and gives way on the hundredth the whole battle is lost. Of course one has to be careful not to insist on things that are unnecessary or unwise, and tact must be used. But patience will be rewarded, for after a time almost imperceptibly the child will have acquired the habit of obedience and be quite natural about it.

Obedience always makes children happy, for they love security and are conscious of it when they realise that someone stronger is holding the reins of government. With obedience comes respect and, curious as it may seem, where there is obedience, there is also liberty.

Constructive discipline

All correction of children should be instructive and constructive, if we really want them to discern what is right and wrong, and to choose the right. Any other way is useless. Children can soon become hardened to punishment and scolding even to the point of ignoring it and going their own way, to the distress of their parents. Much can be avoided if the wrong is noticed and taken seriously at the very first. When corrective punishment has to be given it should definitely be done with a view to fixing the child's mind on the wrong done. A thoughtful parent can think up many ways of doing this. The main thing is to be determined that the child will know what it is punished for and learn never to do it again. To make the child sensitive to what is right and wrong will save much sorrow later.

Care taken to explain the reason why something should be done or not done, put simply and plainly, is often all that is needed, and it is so much better than a hasty rebuke.

Consistent discipline

On occasion a child may be told that if he does a certain thing he will be punished. The child does it but the parent does not carry out the punishment, the result being that the child will not take his parent's word seriously and will in time mistrust his parent in other respects. It is important to carry out one's word whether in the nature of a punishment, a promise or reward. At all costs we should try to avoid the habit of continually threatening to do what we never carry out or even mean to.

It is always wise to decide whether one is ready to carry out a punishment before the warning is given. Once given it should be carried out to the full. There are occasions when it would not

be actually wrong and no harm would be done, when the parent should withhold punishment and deal with the problem in another way. It needs thought, tact and time to plan things in a right way and with the future in view. It is regrettable when parents often just cannot be bothered and so try to find an easy and quick way out whether it is for the good of the child or not, or when they adopt merely a temporary measure which is no more than a lazy or selfish way of evading an important duty. To follow that road will doubtless make life harder and increase difficulties and make one's own life miserable, and the home a place of discord.

Some parents seem to lack the moral courage to give their children the right 'corrective needed; or perhaps it is that they are afraid of falling into disfavour with their children, and resort to self-pity and whining, hoping thus to appeal to them that way. But it seldom works. It is always fatal to allow small children to be masters of the situation. Once they manage to do that, it may become a habit, when they will lose respect for their parents.

Inwardly children will love what they respect and can look up to, and that is something superior to themselves especially in strength of character.

Surely as Christians God commands our reverence above all else because he is above all and before all and he knows that love and adoration follow on the heels of reverence. With godly reverence comes joy, peace, security and confidence as well as love; God becomes the rock of our life and its strength. So with the child: parents must retain their superior position of respect, dignity and strength, if they are to keep the love of their children. Self-pity will never do that. If children lose confidence and respect for their

parents, they will likely turn elsewhere to what they can look up to and respect.

Dignified discipline

To retain the respect of our children has far-reaching effects and will do much in the years to come when they need advice and counsel at times of decision and crisis. Inconsistency on our part will weaken and have an ill effect on the minds of our children concerning our sincerity and integrity. Avoiding this pit-fall of children thinking they have got the better of their parents does not mean that the parents have to shout or be severe in any way. A quiet voice can be powerful, and can often be most effective in the control of children, humbling them and making them sorry. It is a language they will doubtless find different from that elsewhere, whether in the street, with their playmates, later in school or throughout life. The 'still small voice' is most effective. But it is not a weak voice. Parents must be sure of themselves when dealing with their children. They must maintain their stand in a dignified way, with firmness, and be sure that they themselves are right in the insistence of their demands. There is no quicker way of losing children's respect than to punish them in the wrong way, for the wrong reason, in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Some people like to punish children by rebuking them before their friends or other folk. That will most likely have an unhappy rebound. It is always unwise to punish one's children in public.

Love begets love

Nothing hurts so much as wounded love. The parents who have won the love of their children and retain it have the best weapon for so-called punishment. Love begets love and the

parents should love the child in the same unselfish way as God loves us. It is not a soft cuddly love like that given to a teddy bear that is hugged and then neglected for days on end after being thrown into a corner. It is a strong faithful love that the child needs—a love that speaks louder than words.

Occasionally our little ones may look miserable or pensive for no accountable reason. Even an adult passes through such moods. There are times when little children may feel lonely or perhaps fearful. Even a small babe has its fears especially when a strange hand lifts it up, carries or washes it. It is a good thing when a

real love ... will not shrink from correction at the right time and place

child seems unhappy, for the mother to sit down and take the child on her lap and give herself to the child, chatting and showing a special interest, making the child feel loved and needed. It is in that way that the fear is overcome and loneliness forgotten. I have seen such children, who were wanting to feel the touch of mother love, being misunderstood and being told 'run away and play', 'I am very busy just now'. The child goes disconsolately away, but what an opportunity has been missed of laying a foundation for future confidence. How thankful we all are that God does not treat us in that way!

To give them freely of our time in those early stages is to secure their time when the younger years are over. How

easy it is for a parent to lose out for ever by being selfish over time; by sending a child away to find occupation and company elsewhere because he or she 'can't be bothered'. The time may come when the grown child can't be bothered with the parent either. The opportunity was there once but it was neglected and it can never come again in the same way. Many a parent would give much to have the confidence of the child who once sought it in vain at the parent's knee.

Their ultimate good

Above all let us make time, then, to show our love to our children in a practical way, even in the course of correction, as our Lord does to us. How some of us look back and bless the Hand that chastised us sorely at times, when he permitted all his waves and billows to pass over our soul, and when he led us through storms that we might find him for ever. Did it make us love him less? No, it made us love him ten thousand times more and we blessed him for his providential planning and guiding, and for saving us from so much that, had we gone our own way, would have swept us for ever away from him. Surely the same is also true with our children, as we correct them, wisely and kindly, and for their ultimate good in their relationship with God.

Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

A Study of chapter 18 of the Westminster Confession of Faith

James Philip

I. Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation; which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; which hope shall never make them ashamed.

II. This certainly is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit

of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

III. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this

assurance: so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

IV. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness, and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.

This is an important chapter of the Confession, and one which touches upon a believer's well-being in a very practical way. It deals with the question, 'Is it possible to know for sure, here and now, that one is saved?' To this question the Confession and the Scriptures give an emphatic affirmative: 'Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus...*may in this life be certainly sure* that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; which hope shall never make them ashamed.'

There are two major issues involved in this subject, one theological and the other pastoral, and we shall look at these in turn.

the Christian hope is not a probability but a certainty

Theological Issues

There has been a considerable historical debate on the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, from the time of the Reformers down to the present.

The Reformers: assurance of the essence of faith

The early Reformed position taught that assurance of salvation was an essential ingredient of faith, and that therefore faith and assurance of salvation necessarily go together. One reason why this was so clearly asserted in the early days of the Reformation was that when its central message of justification by faith broke upon the

16th century, the whole of Europe was set ablaze with the gospel, and after centuries of the dark ages many were brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. A great certainty came into believers' experience, particularly in contrast with the prevailing emphasis in the pre-Reformation Church, which maintained that it was not possible to be sure of salvation. Thus the Reformers, in preaching the great liberating doctrine of justification by faith, brought a wonderful assurance of salvation, and in the early days of the Reformation glow, assurance of salvation was regarded as an inevitable and indeed an essential ingredient of faith.

Apparent divergence

It will be noted, however, that in Section III of this chapter, a different position is apparently taken: 'This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it...'. But this does not so much represent a distortion of the Reformed view about assurance, for Calvin himself modifies and qualifies his original position. On the one hand he maintains that a right definition of faith includes 'a steady and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us...founded upon the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ...'. But Calvin also says that 'unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts...that though all men confess with the tongue that God is faithful, no man can persuade himself of the truth of it, without the most arduous exertions.'

That is, *often it is quite a struggle* for the true believer to get through to assurance of faith. He goes on to make this plainer still saying that while 'faith ought to be certain and secure, we conceive *not of a certainty attended*

with no doubt, or of a security interrupted by no anxiety: but we rather affirm that believers have a *perpetual conflict with their own diffidence*, and are far from placing their consciences in a placid calm, never disturbed by any storms.'

Calvin therefore recognises that while ideally faith in its strength and perfection has *as an essential ingredient* the assurance of salvation, it may not always express itself in this way, because of the imperfections of our experience, which make us say again and again, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief'.

Useful distinctions: faith and feeling

This seeming variation within the Reformed doctrine itself has been rationalised in different ways. Perhaps most helpfully scholars have made a distinction between the assurance of *faith* and the assurance of *feeling*. Included among such in Scotland were Thomas Boston of Ettrick, Ebenezer Erskine, and James Fisher whose '*Shorter Catechism Explained, By Way of Question and Answer*' (1753) had enormous influence in explaining the teaching of the *Shorter Catechism* to the ordinary folk of Scotland, England and America. Dealing with the answer to Q 36 of the Catechism, about the benefits that accompany justification, adoption and sanctification as being 'assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end', Fisher, in a remarkable series of questions and answers, adds the following:

6. *Whence is it that they who have assurance, peace and joy in the root have not always the sensible possession of these benefits?*

This flows sometimes from a sovereign cause in God, to keep down

a spirit of pride after special manifestations; and sometimes from a sinful cause in believers; such as, untenderness in their walk; resting upon a manifestation; or quenching the kindly motions and operations of the Spirit.

7. *Whether is it the assurance of sense, or the assurance of faith, that is mentioned in this answer?*

It is the assurance of sense, or the sensible (assurance of God's love).

8. What is the difference betwixt the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense?

The object of the assurance of faith, is *Christ in the promise*; but the object of the assurance of sense is *Christ formed in the soul*; or, which is the same thing, the assurance of faith is grounded on the infallible word of God, who cannot lie; but the assurance of sense upon the person's *present experience* of the communications of divine love.

This distinction between the assurance of faith and the assurance of feeling is a useful one which helps us in our understanding of whether or not assurance is of the essence of faith. In the objective sense it *is* of the essence of faith, for where God has planted a real seed of faith in our hearts, part of the growth of that seed is the assurance of faith; but there may be all manner of situations in which the sense of it may be clouded over, and seem to call it in question. This is where it becomes a pastoral rather than a theological issue.

Pastoral Issues

Think first in general terms. There are those to whom the whole idea of claiming to be sure of salvation is completely foreign. They not only do not see how anyone can make such a claim, but they think to do so is

evidence of presumption and arrogance. Behind this objection there is a fundamental misunderstanding due to the meaning of words being confused. To say someone is a Christian ought to be a statement of fact giving certain information about the beliefs held. Unfortunately, however, the word has tended to become a term of commendation. People say when a man does something good or kind, 'That is a Christian act' or 'There is a Christian for you'. Now, if the word *Christian* is to be used as a term of commendation or praise, then obviously for anyone to claim, 'I know I am a Christian' will be regarded as improper, arrogant and presumptuous and equivalent to self-praise.

Assurance for the believer is normative

But 'being a Christian' does not mean 'being a good man'. It has a precise technical meaning describing a disciple of Christ who holds certain beliefs about him. And if so, to say, 'I am a Christian' is not a presumptuous claim, but a statement of fact, just as to say, 'I am married' is a statement of fact. When asked the question, 'Are you married or single?' we do not reply, 'It is not for me to say'. It *is* for us to say. And it *is* for us to say whether or not we are Christians, for this describes us—it does not commend us. To say that someone is not a Christian is not an insult, merely a description.

This, then, is the realm in which the Christian idea of assurance of salvation must be considered. We would think there was something odd about a woman who was not sure whether she was married. In the same way, since 'being a Christian' is, according to Paul, like 'being married to the Lord' (Rom. 7:4), there is something odd about the person who is not sure whether or not she is a Christian. The

natural thing is to be sure.

Now—to pursue the analogy a little further—it is conceivable that someone suffering from amnesia might be unsure whether he was married, although genuinely married. In such circumstances, the proper course would be to conduct some objective investigation. One could find out from the authorities whether in fact the person was married. Signed documents would establish the truth of the matter. But the appeal, in such a case, would be beyond the parties to the marriage, to an objective, independent authority.

sin grieves the Spirit and he withdraws the sweetness of his presence

An appeal to the evidence

This has significance with regard to assurance of salvation, in exactly the same way. Some who are not sure they are in a state of grace may nevertheless be truly saved; others who are not sure may in fact not be. This is the point that is made in Section I. Where there is lack of assurance, investigation is needed to ascertain the truth of the matter. In this connection, the first thing that must be said is that some are not sure of their salvation because they have no grounds for being sure. They are travelling in the wrong direction, and building on the wrong foundation. If we believe that salvation comes by 'doing the best we can', by living a good life, by going to church and saying our prayers, it is not surprising that we do not have any real

assurance, for we are simply vainly trusting in our own works for our salvation. 'We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God', the Confession has already said (Chapter 16:V), echoing Paul's categorical word, 'By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight' (Rom.3:20).

But the same thing may also be said of those who have gone through a form of decision for Christ which has not brought forth the fruits of salvation in their lives. Such people may deceive themselves into assuming that because they have made a decision they are necessarily saved, forgetting that 'faith

*real love ... will not shrink
from correction at the right
time and place*

without works is dead'. 'By their fruits you shall know them,' (Mt.7:20), and if the fruits of regeneration are nowhere evident in a life, a question mark stands over against it. Such ought to be concerned and take the necessary steps to make their calling and election sure.

**Primary evidence: the sure
promise of Scripture**

The hope of the Christian, referred to at the end of Section I, is sure and certain. The word 'hope' as used in the New Testament is more precise and definite than in modern English. We hope that the weather will be fine tomorrow but cannot be absolutely sure. The Christian hope, however, is not a probability, but a certainty; and

when once the Spirit of God has wrought it in our hearts, we have 'an infallible assurance of faith', and this is the theme of Section II. Note two things. First, this 'infallible assurance of faith' is founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation. This means that assurance is objective, not subjective. We can put this very simply, and say that assurance is grounded on the word of God. The Apostle says, 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God *that you may know* that you have eternal life' (1Jn.5:13). In other words, assurance of salvation is through the written word (just as the written evidence on a marriage schedule is the objective proof of the marriage). What we sang as children remains the profoundest insight in this whole matter: Jesus loves me! this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

This is assurance: it comes by the Word and having faith in what God has said. Trusting him is trusting what he has said, and a believer must learn—and be taught—to stand on the Word of God, even against all the evidence of his senses. We may not feel saved, but may have many conflicting thoughts within; but trusting in the bare word of a promising God will ultimately bring assurance to our hearts. Just as the objective reality of the blood that was shed on the cross justifies us in God's sight, so the objective reality of the divine truth of the promises of salvation brings us an infallible assurance of faith. The shed blood makes us safe: the written word makes us sure.

**Secondary evidence:
the Spirit at work**

Secondly, however, assurance of salvation never remains purely objective. There is a necessary

subjective counterpart to it, and this the Confession goes on to describe as 'the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God'. Two things are being said here.

[i] **The fruit of real faith seen outwardly:** On the one hand, saving faith when real never stands alone, but produces fruits in the life, and when these are evident they are a ground of hope for believers who are entitled to assume the hand of God is at work in their lives. It is this that lies behind Peter's words: 'If you do these things you shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2Pet.1:10f.), and Paul's, 'Experience (character) worketh hope' (Rom.5:4), and John's, 'Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments' and, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren' (1Jn.2:3;3:14).

[ii] **The voice of the Spirit heard inwardly:** On the other hand—and this is the second point that the Confession makes on the subjective side—there is the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, 'The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (Rom.8:16). Commentators are careful to point out that Paul does not mean the Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we are the children of God, although this is true. Paul does not say here that the Spirit tells us that we belong to God, but that the Spirit witnesses *alongside* our spirits that we are his. In other words, when our hearts are learning to hope that all is well with us (through our trusting in his Word, and by the evidence of the fruits of salvation in

our lives), alongside this there is another secret testimony by which the Holy Spirit bears witness to God that we are his children.

The struggle of faith

Section III tells us that such a complete and infallible assurance (of sense) does not belong to the essence of faith, and that it is possible that a true believer may wait long before partaking of it. While this is true, it is quite another thing to suggest that faith can be real even if that assurance *never* comes. This is very much open to question, and cannot be substantiated on scriptural grounds. Assurance of salvation ought to come, and will come, in due course. There are two points to be noted here.

[i] **the normal struggles of new birth:** In the first place, it is normal in young believers' experience for there to be many 'teething troubles' before a true assurance of salvation develops, and before they experience joy and peace in believing. New-born babes in Christ are open to peculiar and particular problems and difficulties until Christ is truly formed in them; but the normal course is that joy and peace will come in believing, and we look for this in them. But they must learn to stand in faith upon the written word; and as they do, such problems will subside and they will emerge into a settled faith.

[ii] **failure to thrive:** There is such a thing as a realm of abnormal difficulties. Some true believers have great difficulty in obtaining any real assurance of salvation and doubt and even darkness may persist for years. This needs to be recognised as an abnormal spiritual condition. We sometimes speak of such people as 'doubting Thomases', and it may be that they are constitutionally prone to look on the

dark side of things. It helps to recognise that it may be one's constitution rather than spiritual state that is bringing dark doubts. There is no question but that such people have more difficulty with assurance than others. All the same, the wrestlings they undergo should ultimately pass, and in the effort to win through to assurance, strength, vitality and muscle are wrought into their spiritual lives. They are not ultimately the losers, for God makes capital out of their trial, for their good.

God's grace is sufficient for all

But—normal or abnormal though the difficulties be—*no extraordinary means* are needed for the development of true assurance of faith (Sect. III). It is salutary for us to remember this, for when we pass through such difficulties we sometimes cry to God for some special token that we are truly his, and when he does not appear to answer, we may be tempted to fear he has forsaken us. The Confession properly points out that the right use of ordinary means of grace is all that is required. To steep our hearts and minds in the teaching of the Scriptures is the divine prescription by which God brings us into assurance of salvation. He means that we should rest in the trustworthiness of his Word. We need no more than this.

When dark clouds come

The final Section (IV) deals with four temporary interruptions to assurance. The first is *negligence* in preserving it. If we break the rules of the spiritual life, in the sense of being careless instead of diligent—in prayer, Bible-study, fellowship—our lines of communication become blocked and our assurance obscured. The second is *sin*. If we let sin come between us and God, it will not be surprising if we lose sight of his face for a while; and we

know what a difference when the sun is clouded over. Sin grieves the Spirit, and he withdraws not his presence but the sweetness of that presence. When this happens, our assurance will cloud over too and doubts disturb our peace. The third consideration is sudden or vehement *temptation*. When this comes on us, we may feel ourselves not only swept off our feet, but even abandoned, and this can bring a terrible desolation on the human spirit. Fourthly, there is the experience of *walking in inexplicable darkness*, when we seem to have no light and are left to grope helplessly, as if isolated and alone. This is a perplexing and distressing experience. It is not easy to hold to our assurance of faith in face of the inscrutable dealings of Providence. Yet we must endeavour to do so.

*When we in darkness walk, nor feel
the heavenly flame,
Then is the time to trust our God
and rest upon His Name.*

Nor must we let everything go. There are still Christian duties to perform, obedience to be offered to the will of God, love to be shown to the brethren. These are obligatory for us, however we may feel. It is as we seek to fulfil them in all sincerity and faithfulness, battling on through the darkness, that we win through. The very exercise of faith in the dark will bring back and renew our assurance, and the call of duty saves us from going down into utter despair.

(By James Philip, formerly of Holyrood Abbey Church, Edinburgh.)

A Re-examination of the Role of Praying Societies in Scottish Church Life

Shirley A. Fraser

In his brief article on 'Praying Societies in Scottish History',¹ M. Barker selects a quotation from A. Skevington Wood's, *The Inextinguishable Blaze*: 'The formation of praying societies represented a spiritual force in Scotland, the ultimate repercussions of which can hardly be calculated.'

The pertinancy of that observation is borne out by a fuller examination of some of the fascinating accounts of fellowship groups for Bible study, prayer and mutual encouragement in late 17th-century and early 18th-century Scotland. What were the theological 'roots' of such societies? Undoubtedly, they lay in the Reformation truths of Scripture: justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, the corporate life of the early church.

As the precious English New Testament, translated by John Wycliff, reached the hands of those who were hungering to know the truth of God's Word, so groups sprang up for study, the early 16th-century Lollards of Ayrshire being one example. When John Knox was in Geneva in 1556, he wrote in these terms exhorting the

believers in Scotland to 'hold weekly assemblies, to open and close their meetings with prayer; to read planelie and distinctlie a portion of Scripture, whilk endit, gif any brother have exhortation, interpretation or dout, lat him not fein to speik and more the same, sa that he do it with moderation, either to edifie or to be edifiet.'²

After a time, that practice appeared to have died out until it was revived by Scots living in Ireland, when their ministers were banished. From Ireland, groups meeting for prayer and encouragement sprang up in the south west of Scotland in the early decades of the 17th century. Scottish church leaders became alarmed and by 1639 had brought up the issue at the General Assembly, in order to have the prayer societies suppressed. However, godly men like Samuel Rutherford, Robert Blair, David Dickson, John Livingstone and others defended these meetings, quoting the scriptural warrants such as James 5:16, 'Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another,' and Malachi 3:16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often with one another,' adding: 'this things could not be done

in publick meetings.'³ At the general Assembly two years later, such societies were banned under an 'Act against Impiety and Schisme.'

As the 17th century Scottish Church entered into the years of suffering and persecution, the Covenanting cause was kept alight by praying societies, which formed themselves together into the 'United Societies'. Shaping the ethos of groups for fellowship, Bible study and prayer were other influences including the Pietist movement developing in Europe under such leaders as Spener, Francke and Zinzendorf. In England too there were religious societies to be found from the late 17th-century, members of which were loyal to the Church of England and eager to see spiritual growth. Deeply influenced by saintly Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611-84), Henry Scougal (1650-78) nurtured such a praying society in Aberdeen where he was Professor of Divinity, and contributed the classic devotional book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677) to the wider Church. Thomas Hog of Kiltarn (1628-92) was a member of the group in King's College, and was to have a deep influence on the

movement of evangelical laymen in the Highlands (known as 'The Men').

As Moderatism gained ground in the Scottish Church of the early 18th century and believers chafed under the yoke of patronage, 'vital religion' was kept alive in the societies which met for prayer all over the land. The records of the Praying Society of St Andrews trace back its existence to 1717, and record 84 names of members. Its 'foundation' and 'Laws carefully to be observ'd and kept by all members of the Society' are preserved, together with some 571 questions which were 'propos'd by members of the society and answer'd therein, the society approving the answers.'⁴

Some examples are:

Q6 How shall a person after covenanting to God, carry under strong temptations?

Q9 Wherein consists the sin agt [against] the Holy Ghost?

Q13 What are the most proper means for attaining assurance?

The record of the 'Laws carefully to be observed' reveals that very careful organization was a feature of at least some praying societies in the early 18th-century, rather than only the latter part, as some have suggested. Rule II in Ebenezer Erskine's Rules for the Portmoak Praying Society reads, 'The members of the Society shall pray by turns, according to the alphabetical order of their names; and at every meeting three, or at most five or six shall pray; except when Providence calls for more than ordinary wrestling.'⁵ Such records of praying societies do not indicate their theological inspiration. However, Prof. Davidson states: 'their theology was Calvinism, tempered by the tenderness of the theology of the Marrow, and their aim was personal holiness.'⁶

What exactly did *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* teach? This 17th-

century work attributed to the Englishman, Edward Fisher, was first published in 1645 and re-published in 1718, with a recommendatory Preface by James Hog (1658-1734) of Carnock whereupon this originally obscure work quickly became a household 'classic'. Professor Hugh Watt considered its appeal lay in 'its vivifying quality [which] was largely a breath from Martin Luther' and 'its power derived from re-establishing contact 'with the joy and vigour and assurance of the Reformation Gospel.'⁷ Luther was cited at least 46 times, compared to Calvin's¹², the author of *The Marrow* having made very full use of Luther's *Choice Sermons*. The Reformation doctrine of justification by faith through grace sounded out in *The Marrow*, with the assertion that holiness was not necessary for salvation. In a climate of hyper-Calvinism and arid Moderatism, such teaching which encouraged assurance of salvation and 'enthusiasm' was objectionable, and open to the charge of heresy, in particular, antinomianism. Nevertheless, 'the Marrowmen recaptured the evangelical note',⁸ and their theology was to be perpetuated in two separate strands of the Scottish Church from 1733—the Secession (and later the Relief) Churches, and the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland.

In his article on The Praying Societies in the U.P. Magazine of 1899, Professor Davidson wondered why these societies 'did not secede before the Secession'. He remarked that 'though they did not cause the Secession, they prepared the way for it'.⁹ The praying societies were composed of people from different social classes, lay folk, drawn together in a common desire for spiritual nurture. Correspondence between societies plus a 'transference' procedure existed, though they did not have 'pastors'. In the record of the ministry

of Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754), one of the founders of the Secession, we read that in his Portmoak parish there were five praying societies which continued long after his time. The Rules for these fellowship groups included:

1. 'That upon the 15th and last day of every month we will meet together, in order to spend some time in prayer, and conference about things of a spiritual concern.

3. 'If we observe any of the Society to fall into any sin, or to be guilty of anything unsuitable to the Gospel, he that observes it shall, with Christian prudence, warn the party of it; and if he offends again in the same way, and

how shall a person after covenanting to God, carry under strong temptations?

shall not hear them, the observer or another shall acquaint the Society at the next meeting; and if he will not hear them, then he shall be excluded from them and not again admitted till the Society be satisfied anent the repentance and amendment, and when received again it must be done by a vote of the Society.

6. 'When any member of the Society is absent, he shall give his excuse to the next meeting; and when any absent themselves without reason for several days together, he shall be excluded from the Society.

8. 'If the Society increase to a great number, in that case we shall divide ourselves into two Societies, and in order to maintain unity, not withstanding the division, there shall be

a general meeting upon the last day of every month.

9. 'Nothing shall be divulged that is spoken in the Society, which may in the least tend the prejudice of the Society, or any members thereof.'

Other sets of Rules, such as those drawn up by John Hepburn of Urr (1680-1723) for his Praying Societies (of Hebronites) are still extant.¹⁰

As the Seceders formed the Associate Presbytery, an Act of 1740 stated that 'they recommend to such as have acceded to them, to form themselves into societies for prayer and Christian Conference, this being a duty commanded in the Word of God, and

them, and as the Lord in His providence may call and direct.'¹² In Orkney, for example, where the Secession churches grew because of the barrenness of the Church of Scotland, it is recorded: 'Its prayer meetings are numbered by hundreds, and their frequenters by thousands, while the liberality that has sometimes been manifested in the missionary cause has risen almost to a primeval standard.'¹³

That the Praying Societies were vital to the existence and continuation of Secession Churches in Scotland is indisputable. What place did they have in the Church of Scotland after 1733? They were instrumental in kindling expectancy in ordinary people that the Lord could visit them in times of blessing.

Arthur Fawcett describes the life of godly lay people, hungering for teaching, reading the devotional 'classics' such as *The Marrow*, and Robert Fleming's *The Fulfilling of Scripture* (1669) which spoke of the revivals in Stewarton (1625) and Shotts (1630). 'In these former classic examples of powerful movement of the Spirit, prayer was central in each situation...some are not surprised to learn that societies for prayer began to be revived in Cambuslang.' When McCulloch came 'in 1731...there were three of these meetings. In 1742 [the year of the great Cambuslang revival or 'Cams' lang Wark] they increased to a dozen or more'.¹⁴ That revival, along with others in places like Kilsyth came at a crucial time for the Kirk. In Fawcett's opinion, 'The revival stopped the drift to the Secession and, although Moderate policy served to nullify much that had been accomplished, yet a nucleus of sincere men and women, ministers and laymen, were left behind within their mother church. They preserved the tradition of groups, meeting for prayer and fellowship, and had a direct connection with the events

leading up to the Disruption of 1843.'¹⁵ In other words, they sustained the Evangelical 'remnant' in the Church of Scotland. They gave the only outlet for lay involvement at a time when there was a deep-rooted distrust of lay preaching.

(Another avenue of study is opened up by the question as to the influence, if any, existing praying societies had on John Wesley and his formation of Methodist 'bands' and 'classes'. There was a strong link between John Wesley and Dr John Gillies of Glasgow, and the former recorded in his Journal on his fourth visit to Scotland in 1759: 'In the afternoon I met several of the members of the praying societies, and showed them what Christian fellowship was, and what need they had of it. About 40 of them met me on Sunday 27th in Mr Gillies' kirk, immediately after evening service. I left them determined to meet Mr Gillies weekly, at the same time and place.'¹⁶)

Apart from the tragic breach between George Whitefield and the leaders of the Secession, which meant that the latter could only condemn the wonderful outpouring of God's Spirit at Cambuslang, Christian leaders found that denominational divisions were not a major barrier to their shared work of the Gospel, and another fascinating area of study lies in the inter-connectedness of the praying societies, the revivals of the mid 18th century in Scotland and North America, Jonathan Edward's 'Concert for Prayer' and the development of the Missionary Movement in the late 18th century, with the founding of the London Missionary Society and other agencies. That first 'Concert for Prayer' was dated 1744, and was to be for two years initially. Prayer was to be made on the first Tuesday of February, May, August and November. It was extended for a further seven years, and reiterated in 1784, when it was

its prayer meetings are numbered by hundreds and their frequenters by thousands

which has been much owned and countenanced of the Lord. (Mal.3:16): and in these societies, instead of questions...together with a diligent reading of the holy Scriptures, they also carefully peruse our Confession of Faith and the Catechisms Longer and Shorter and read the Scripture-proofs subjoined to the same, that they may see that their faith, as to those articles of religion, does not terminate as a human, but as a divine testimony in the Word; and that they make use of such approved helps opening up those principles, as they may have at hand.'¹¹

By August 1754, the Associate Presbytery was recommending 'unto all the Praying Societies under their inspection to observe diets for fasting and humiliation, as they can overtake

embraced by John Sutclif of Olney and the Northampton Association which influenced William Carey and others to found the Baptist Missionary Society.¹⁷ The praying societies throughout Scotland gradually took on a concern for the evangelisation of those in 'foreign parts' as well as benighted areas in Scotland, which was beginning to feel the impact of the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation.

Change was to mark the prayer societies as well. Although one such was still in existence in Kilsyth in 1839 when a further revival came under the ministry of William Chalmers Burns (1815-68), many of the groups ceased to exist in their original form, as they became increasingly minister-led, and incorporated into church life, focusing on church buildings. Dr Barker noted that 'men like McCheyne both had a church prayer meeting and encouraged private praying societies. Andrew Bonar, struggling with a hard and difficult rural parish in Angus, started cottage meetings and later kitchen meetings when he moved to his church extension charge among the new tenements of Glasgow. By the late 19th-century, however, despite the short stimulus to the prayer meeting of the 1859 revival and the Moody campaigns, the old praying society or fellowship meeting was extinct and church magazines of the day bewail the state of the church prayer meeting—not only in the Established Church or its giant sisters the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church, but also in the valiant and revered Original Secession Church which had sprung from just such groups. Certainly prayer meetings still existed but no longer in the everyday life of the parish and church.'¹⁸

move into church buildings were two of the reasons for their decline, coupled with the loss of evangelical beliefs which had once warmed the hearts of ordinary people in the Kirk and led them to desire to study the Scriptures and pray together. By the beginning of this century, such Bible-believing, praying folk might be found more often within the membership of the Baptists, Brethren and Mission Halls. What do the Praying Societies of an earlier period say to us as we near the end of the 20th century in a Church of Scotland in rapid decline?

We note a new, and growing feature of Church life across the denominations: the development of small groups in congregations and across denominational boundaries. Many Church of Scotland members have their faith nurtured in house groups for Bible study and prayer, in 'Alpha' groups, in men's, women's, even young people's prayer groups. The spirit of the age which has given rise to marked individualism has to be countered by life in meaningful relationships and encouragement to live as a Christian in an increasingly hostile climate.

As believers re-awaken to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his work in the Body of Christ, so 'every-member ministry' finds an expression in small groups, perhaps not all that different from the praying societies. As the longing grows to see God pour out his Spirit in revival once again, so the movements like 'Pray across the nation', have arisen, and people respond again to the notion of a 'Concert for Prayer'.

Will we see happening in the closing years of the 20th century the kind of spiritual awakening like that in Aberdeen: 'all classes...specially marked in the case of assistants in banks and solicitors' offices, in the numerous drapery and other establishments, and among engineers, joiners, painters,

masons, plumbers, boat-builders, shipwrights and coachbuilders. Scarcely a shop could be found in the whole length of Union Street, without at least one young man who had come under the influence of the revival. And the awakening extended to university students...of Theology, Arts and Medicine.'¹⁹

(By Shirley A. Fraser, St Georges's Parish Church, Aberdeen.)

Endnotes

- 1 Barker: *Praying Societies in Scottish History*, Christian Graduate, Vol. XVI, IVP, Leicester, p.1
- 2 Hay Fleming, *The Praying Society of St. Andrews*, Original Secession Church Magazine 1879 p.41
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *ibid.* p.45
- 5 Quoted in Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*, Banner of Truth, 1971, p.69
- 6 Davidson: *Historical Revivals: The Praying Societies*, U.P. Magazine June 1899, p.250
- 7 Hugh Watt: *The Influence of Martin Luther on Scottish Religion in the 18th century*, SCHS VI (1938)
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Op.cit.*
- 10 John Hepburn, *Rules and Directions for Fellowship Meetings*, 1756
- 11 Act of the Associate Presbytery: Dunfermline August 12, 1740, printed as an appendix to J. Hepburn's 'Rules', 1756
- 12 Andrew Thomson and Gavin Struthers, *History of the Secession and Relief Churches* (1848), p.147
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Fawcett, *op.cit.*, p.56
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.202
- 16 Dugald Butler, *Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland*, 1898
- 17 Ernest A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784*, 1942
- 18 Barker, *op.cit.* pp.3,4
- 19 Ian Muirhead, *The Revival as a Dimension of Scottish Church History*, SCHS XX, 1910, p.187

We are prompted to ask whether increasing clerical domination and the

Medical Aspects to Homosexual Orientation: A Christian Response

Dr. Calum MacKellar

Though an extensive continuum exists ranging from heterosexuality and bisexuality to exclusive homosexuality it is generally accepted that people classifying themselves as homosexuals in our society represent 3-4 % of the male and 1-2% of the female population. Numerous environmental and physiological explanations have been proposed as to the cause of homosexuality but it is only now becoming evident that no single, all-encompassing factor can be considered in the aetiology of this sexual orientation. Indeed if it is recognised that in the majority of cases the origins of homosexuality have predominantly environmental characteristics, these cannot yet be considered as the exclusive causal factors. Although each instance is different, for a minority of homosexuals a prevailing medical explanation has been suggested.

Within the Christian community, a great resistance and reluctance to accept this possible physiological dimension exists. The following article

seeks to discuss homosexuality from a Christian and medical perspective though some arguments will also be relevant to homosexuality acquired from predominantly environmental causes.

The gay-rights campaign

During the last 25 years, Gay-rights campaigners have challenged society to cease rejecting the homosexual lifestyle as immoral, and accept it as a valid expression of what they are.¹ The underlying issue behind this campaign is the demand that homosexuality and heterosexuality be accepted on equal grounds as sexual alternatives. This was often expressed by such statements as 'You may say that homosexual practice is against nature and normality; but it's not against my nature, nor is it in the slightest degree abnormal for me.'²

This argument, however, which states that the natural and the normal are acceptable whereas the unnatural and abnormal are not, without any precise definition of the words, cannot

be made the basis of a definitive ethical judgement. Indeed the definitions of 'normality' as 'a state of being conformed to usual standards', and 'natural' as 'not artificially prepared or arisen' have no direct relationship with 'morality' defined as 'a state relating to the rightness or wrongness of human behaviour.'³

As a result of the confusion that exists between these definitions many flawed arguments have been supported by scientists and the media. An example of this is characterised by the statement that since homosexuals are not responsible for the physical and psychiatric state of their brains they should not be condemned for their actions nor be deprived of happiness by restrictions on their behaviour. Here, the argument about 'what is natural' is related to morality when no real connection exists. What is innate is not automatically acceptable.

In this context it would appear that any argument which allows the homosexual to escape responsibility for

his behaviour is encouraged whether or not it is consistent.

The beliefs of the church

At present many Christians hold views on homosexuality which are based on the same unfortunate arguments as those of the Gay-rights movement. Their condemnation of it as 'unnatural' once again makes a false link between morality and normality which leads to the conclusion that what is unnatural must also be immoral. In common with the Gay-rights campaigners many Christians have also been reluctant to see homosexuality as a physiological disorder comparable with, for example, blindness. The objections of Christians to this explanation may arise from a variety of fears.

For some the fear that some forms of homosexuality are not learned but physiologically determined is a consequence of their fear of losing control of the 'healing' process for the homosexual person which they believe would be the case if, for example, a possible genetic predisposition was proposed. These people then encourage the idea that 'what is a learned behaviour can be unlearned.'⁴

Others reject automatically any new possibility that might change their traditional conservative patterns of thinking. This is sadly comparable with the difficulty expressed by the Apostle Peter in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and the problem of their circumcision. He was finally rebuked by God through Paul for his unwillingness to accept the strange new 'untraditional' theological situation (Acts 15).

Again, others are afraid of the possibility of being unable to 'pass the buck' for the 'evil' homosexual characteristics. Since they believe that one cannot be born a (homosexual)

sinner they refuse any possibility that might endanger their concept of God being in control of the right human sexuality.

Finally, when no sins can be found in the afflicted person, some concentrate on the sins of the parents. Although homosexuality may often be the consequence of parental problems, this is not always the case. Distress and suffering can be unrelated to any specific sin as exemplified in Jn.9:2: 'Jesus' disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

From a theological perspective it is essential for Christians to remember that the consequences of the Fall were not only felt in human society as such. Sin also affected the very nature of men and women with the existence of sad and distressing physiological deregulations. It would be therefore exceedingly unwise for Christians to declare that one cannot be born a homosexual (for genetic or physiological causes).⁵

For years the Church defended the theory that the sun circled around the earth with statements to the contrary being condemned as heresy. Only when the real facts were proven did the Church humbly admit its mistake. To ignore or deny scientific research that suggests a possible genetic predisposition or hormonal deregulations in homosexual orientation would be as prejudicial and irresponsible.

The question of whether homosexuality has a biological basis has often been equated to whether it is a sickness or a sin, and whether it should be accepted by society.⁶ That a homosexual tendency is inborn or

environmentally produced is, however, morally irrelevant as long as a person continues to take responsibility for his decisions. Personal responsibility is a basic human gift which gives us our dignity. With more research into the human mind taking place, more of what one could call predispositions to evil are coming to light. Homosexuality, predisposition to anger, violence and alcoholism are just a few of the many human traits which psychiatrists and neurochemists now suggest might be encouraged by possible physiological defects in the brain. A fine balance needs to be found however in Psychiatric-Ethical

Christians have been reluctant to see homosexuality as a physiological disorder

problems so that the responsibility of the person is not neglected.

For example, if a man notices his attraction for handsome teenage boys he has the choice of either obeying his impulses and seeking physical relationships with them or obeying his conscience in the search for help despite the difficulties and distresses involved. Choice and responsibility are always present.

The Christian perspective

For Christians, though they may not always comprehend at present all the biblical reasons against homosexual practice, the development of their trust in the truth, goodness and grace of the Word of God remains a solution.

Obedience to God's precepts and acknowledgement of his profound love, grace and wisdom often engender more conviction to enable the homosexual person to continue on the narrow road than any contemporary argument. The sufferings and distress which the homosexual Christian will encounter, described in a moving article by the Revd William Still,⁷ are very real and sometimes relentless but God will never abandon nor forsake his child. Sometimes no explanations can be given for the profound sufferings the homosexual person encounters. A possible acceptance of his participation, in a mysterious way, in

*sometimes no explanation
can be given for the profound
sufferings the homosexual
person encounters*

the sufferings of Christ who understands and loves him, may be the only possible solution in the comprehension of this difficult situation (see 1Pet.4:13).

**Reaction from the
medical profession**

The chequered history of the reaction by the medical profession to the treatment of homosexuality as a disease is exemplified by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). After some uneasiness from members of the Association with respect to the revised list of mental sicknesses of 1968, which included homosexuality, the APA proceeded on 15 December 1973 to vote on this famous list. Thirteen out

of fifteen members voted to delete homosexuality from it. Indeed from now on it would only be a question of perturbed sexual orientation...which would not affect all of the homosexuals but only those who were not satisfied with their situation (and considered *themselves* to be 'sick').

The Gay community cried 'victory' but many psychoanalysts and psychiatrists found difficulty in accepting the proceedings of the APA and demanded that they should be withdrawn. A referendum resulted in April 1974. After much lobbying from the Gay-rights movement, 58% of the 10,000 voters confirmed the decision of the APA to exclude homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

However because democratic votes are not equivalent to scientific results,⁸ the decision left many to continue to believe that homosexuality is a disorder. For others, if homosexuality is no longer a disease it still constitutes a 'deviance' or a 'malfunction' in the patient. The fine line between deviance and sickness, however, is not characterised,⁹ and one comes back to the need for redefinition of the limits of 'normal' sexuality.

**The medical aetiology of
homosexuality**

An ever increasing number of articles are at the moment being presented suggesting different medical causes for the homosexual orientation. For a recent review of the propositions one can refer to the paper by J. Bancroft under four headings: hormonal mechanisms, brain structure, neuropsychological function, and genetic factors. He concludes that the phenomenon of sexual orientation is a consequence of multifactorial development processes in which biological factors are always to be

considered alongside complex psychological ones.

Ethics and homosexuality

During the 20th century the homosexual has grown to be a person with a past, a story and a childhood. He has also unfortunately become a species of his own. Indeed sexuality for the homosexual has become the ultimate truth of his being.¹⁰ This sad predicament was developed even though the medicalisation of homosexuality should have protected it from moral judgement. No longer is any distinction made between sickness and vice or between mental and moral disorder.

The stigmatisation of the homosexual is without doubt the result of the development in the classification of sexuality. It was, alas, homosexuals themselves with the help of sexologists wanting to reform their presence in society which enabled the 'deviant' to be chained into abnormality¹¹ —the abnormality being then linked to immorality. J. Weeks¹² demonstrated the responsibility of sexologists in the formation of the homosexual type. Others propose that they actually created them.¹³ The sexologists became the ones who decided what normality should represent and how it should be achieved. All sorts of hormonal and surgical experiments were the consequence of their efforts to change homosexuals into their 'right' sexuality.

Contemporary society has not liberated the homosexual person from his/her prison.¹⁴ After 150 years no one can still know for certain the origins of this often imprecise behaviour. The multiplicity of explanations serves only to encourage the mystery and therefore its strangeness.

Moreover, the negative image of

homosexuality reinforced the positive aspects and desirability of heterosexuality,¹⁵ the rejection of the solitary differences and abnormalities of the gay person by the heterosexual majority being also used in this way to affirm and confirm their own heterosexuality.

What future for the homosexual?

In the last thirty years the homosexual movement has known the same fate as other minorities. After a time of vindication for the right to be different they hopefully will understand the dangers in persevering on this road which leads to stigmatisation and 'ghettoisation'.¹⁶ The difference is then no longer chosen but imposed by the heterosexual majority. For many homosexuals who are not Christians, only a deep conviction of their acts before God will enable them to understand and accept their imbalance. They will then learn that God does not see them as homosexuals but as human beings whom he loves, despite their sexual orientation.

For the Christian afflicted with homosexuality, though medical evidence is still uncertain, it may, if confirmed, provide the possibility for some to accept their predicament as a physiological disorder comparable with other malfunctions not always treatable with success. The fact that morality is not present in the causes of their homosexuality may encourage some to struggle against their inherent self-condemnation and depreciation. Morality does come however into what the suffering homosexual does with his/her burden. Heterosexual friends should seek to alleviate this cross in offering their deep compassion and assistance in the fight against any homosexual practice an individual may encounter. Much help will be required

for him/her to resist the ever present and profound temptations existing within his/her brain. Through this assistance a faithful solidarity should be shown in helping him/her to avoid traumatising and dangerous situations. This might at first seem difficult but is already being promoted and encouraged for problems encountered by other disadvantaged people seeking to be integrated in society. The church will then learn wholly to accept the homosexual person, as another child of God, whom He deeply loves, whilst rejecting homosexual physical relationships.

Christian self-help groups supported by competent counsellors are in existence for homosexual persons enabling compassionate assistance and encouragement. For more information contact 'True Freedom Trust'.¹⁷

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Dr Tom Brown from the Department of Psychiatry, St John's Hospital at Howden, Livingston EH54 6PP, Scotland, for his help, assistance and support in the writing of this article.

(By Dr Callum MacKellar, European Bioethical Research, Edinburgh.)

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17 True Freedom Trust, PO Box 3, Upton Wirral. Merseyside, England, L49 6NY.

*heterosexual friends
should seek to alleviate
his cross in offering their
deep compassion*

Evangelism in Pastoral Work

Peter White

A number of years ago, an elder came to see me at vestry hour. He was thinking of leaving the congregation to go to another, less clearly evangelical, more acceptable to his wife. We had spent time together on occasion; I knew he was aware he was unconverted. Since now there was nothing to lose I asked, 'Do you think you are in a spiritually fit condition to make such a decision?' After a long pause we explored the way of salvation. About ninety minutes and some tears later he went home a new man in Christ; he was to prove a particular help in significant congregational decision-making thereafter.

There was a delightful additional component that night. It was the student attachment's first time at vestry hour. As I drove him home he said, 'Are all vestry hours like that?'

This brief article is not devoted to specifically evangelistic visiting, whether of the door-to-door or any other type. Such work deserves its own treatment. The article rather affirms that when God pleases, people do come to Christ—through the preached Word, in their homes, at vestry hour,

in Christian enquiry class, in the course of normal ministry. It suggests significant factors in our part, as pastors or Christian workers, in that divine work of grace.

I want to explore both the context and the ministry of soul-winning because they depend so much on each other.

The Context of Our Evangelism

Stick to our priorities

'I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy,' said Paul to the Corinthian Christians. 'I promised you to one husband, to Christ.' It is easy to pay lip service to the priority of salvation and yet at the same time to allow the tyranny of the urgent or wider concerns for the needy to drive it out of our diaries.

Principles of good management have a lesson for us in this regard. In their now legendary book 'In Search of Excellence'¹ Peters and Waterman identified features common to well run companies. One of them is what they

call 'Stick to Knitting.' Effective companies maintain a focus, they do what they were set up to do. Christian leaders likewise need to stick first to the work of salvation, and not let even good things drive out the best.

Live by our values

There is a small number of texts on the values underlying pastoral care, that every Christian worker would do well to review frequently: Jeremiah 23:1-4, Ezekiel 34, John 10:1-30 and Acts 20:17-38. Let's identify three core values which they imply.

First, *we must know our people*. A good shepherd has a real interest in the sheep. The good pastor is identifiable by the same affectionate, diligent attention. He takes time getting to know each person. He particularly watches out for change in them. He keeps notes so as to remember important things about them.

Second, *we must care for our people*. The basic thought in the Bible's words for care are particularly instructive in this regard. The OT word *darash* indicates a searching out for, a seeking others' welfare. Psalm 142:4 and

Jeremiah 23:4 give the feel. The NT words imply concern—our people weighing heavily on us, our anxiety for them.

Third, *we work that Christ may reign over our people*. This appears remarkably in the Ezekiel chapter. I do not suppose there is a passage in the Bible which more clearly lays out the concerns of pastoring. God states his deepest desire for his people towards the end of the chapter:

‘I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend (literally, feed) them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them.’

This is the heart of pastoring: the nurturing of Christ’s kingship in the lives of his people.

Be diligent in our duties

I mentioned core passages on pastoring. They point not only to underlying values by which to live, but also to five essential pastoral tasks.

- *To pastor is to pasture*: that is, to ensure spiritual food. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that this is the first priority in spiritual pastoring, just as it is in physical pastoring. If the sheep are hungry the shepherd is failing in his duty. The same is true spiritually: ‘man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God’s mouth.’ This calls for a balanced diet of the whole of Scripture, expounded faithfully and applied practically, the whole process being empowered through prayer.

- *To pastor is to gather together*: that is, to ‘herd’ the flock. A good minister takes steps to build up the sense of being a family, to nourish the congregation’s identity as a community, their commitment to the corporate life of worship, affection, support and service.

- *To pastor is to protect*. In literal shepherding this was especially true in biblical times when lions and bears were daily realities. The Lord made use of this when complaining in Ezekiel 34 that the nation’s leaders had left the people unprotected and they had become food for ‘wild animals.’ Paul made the same point in Miletus to the elders of the Ephesian congregation: ‘I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you’ (Acts 20:29). The world, the flesh, the devil, false teachers—there is no let-up for pastors. We are to guard the people we serve.

- *To pastor is to heal*. Many are the wounds behind the brave faces present on a Sunday; pastoring involves strengthening the weak, healing the sick and binding up the injured (Ezek. 34:4). One of the most valuable pastoral gifts is the instinct when to be firm, when gentle, when to rebuke, when to reassure.²

- *To pastor is to lead*. A good minister ‘leads them out. When he has brought out all his own he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him’ (Jn. 10:3f). I’m not sure there is any more crucial factor in congregational progress, outside the spiritual quality of the preached Word, than the minister’s capacity to give a clear lead as to what should constitute the church’s life and development.

Maintain our spiritual ambition

I suppose this is nowhere more important than in the steady round of faithful visiting and pastoral care. It is easy to be nice and kind, but to be ever alert for progress without pious pushiness requires both a deeper spirituality and a considered approach. For the latter purpose I have found a social work textbook by Gerard Egan helpful.³

Take an example of the value of approaching difficult pastoral matters systematically. One or two of us had wondered for some time how to help a ceaseless complainer in a certain congregation. Egan’s work offers a way of approaching the problem. Assess each situation along three lines: the present scenario, the preferred scenario, how to get from one to the other. Egan subdivides each stage into a series of steps, but his overall approach was the eye-opener for me: rather than stand helpless as the lady pours out her vitriol, approach the problem rationally.

Stage one: analyse what is happening, why, what might be the

the good pastor is identifiable by affectionate, diligent attention

blind spots that we could challenge.

Stage two: identify just what progress it is that you long to see and help her towards.

Stage three: brainstorm ways of moving in that direction, choose the best fit for the situation and make an attempt at it for Jesus.

Don’t give up in despair or lose your spiritual edge out of inertia or sheer exhaustion; maintain your spiritual ambition.

Never stop asking God for conversions

When our Lord met Bartimaeus he asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He was told to specify what he most wanted from Jesus: a useful

discipline. We are told, 'Ask, and it shall be given,' and that we must always pray and never give up. We are invited, You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes the city of God. Let us persevere in asking God as much to beget new life and bring folk to the birth from above, as to develop the spiritual growth of our Christian folk.

I have tried to describe the context in which there is the greatest potential for natural, unforced evangelism: an authentic minister whose preaching is substantial nourishment for the soul and whose relationships tell a story of faithful care, voracious interest,

a good minister takes steps to build up the sense of being a family

spiritual vitality. Given that favourable context, how do we take the opportunities which God gives concerning the new birth, winning souls, 'snatching others from the fire and saving them'?

Evangelism in the Course of Pastoral Work

Watch our Lord at work. When he met the woman of Samaria at the well he was not pietistic, he was natural: 'Please would you give me a drink?' The conversation thereafter moves (and surely what we have is a summary) quite naturally between basic human issues and spiritual encounter.⁴ Packer identifies five stages in Christ's work here:

1. Approach whoever is there. Chance meetings are not chance at all, and Jesus was ready to give himself to anyone who would receive him; so he spoke to her straight away.

2. Appeal to whatever is there. Having appealed to her sympathy, our Lord raises an opportunity by a pointer to deeper things (living water) and takes it as she responds.

3. Arouse a sense of sin. I've a suspicion most of us could to advantage be that bit bolder without being offensive: 'But we don't manage to achieve even our own standards, do we?...'

4. Allow spiritual interest to grow. Jesus did not fob off her questions about worship. He trusted the Holy Spirit and showed the woman respect by dealing with her questions.

5. Affirm Christ's own authority and claim. We cannot say, 'I that speak to you am he,' but we can constantly point to Jesus as Saviour and Lord.⁵

There is often the temptation to lower our standards. Jesus, however, never did and it is only planning for disaster if we give in to that temptation. A young woman dropped in for advice because a Christian friend had influenced her at work. She was contemplating the faith but was living with a boy she loved—would she have to stop living with him in order to become a Christian? We explored the variables in this equation but to the question, would she have to turn from sin—including this particular sin—in order to become a Christian, I answered yes. It is no honour to Christ to lower the standards for the sake of adding to the kingdom. Our Lord said, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.' We have no right to offer

people a cuddly Christianity that requires no repentance and makes no demands.

The person's destiny for all eternity is at stake, it is true; but we are not in a race. The Holy Spirit loves people infinitely more than we do. Let our urgency be in our praying; and let our relationships be unforced, trusting the Holy Spirit: ever ready, but never manipulative.

There is every point, however, in being ready and able to take the opportunities which God gives, when the conversation turns naturally to spiritual things. Once people have moved on from lack of interest or from opposing world views, to exploring the core of the Gospel, two important resources are a thorough knowledge of the way of salvation, and a readiness to explain the Gospel clearly using a selection of questions and approaches.

As to the way of salvation, the essential ingredients in the Christian Gospel are the four themes: God, sin, Jesus, me.⁶ In clarifying a person's perception of the faith I would check for an understanding of at least the following:

- God: Luke 12:6f: he knows all about us, delights in our coming to know him. But...

- Sin: Isaiah 59:1f: it makes a separation between us and him, and it matters. But...

- Jesus: 1 Peter 3:18: he died, bearing our sins, to bring us to God. So...

- Me: John 1:12: as many as receive him, to them he gives the power to become the children of God. So, Mark 1:15, believe the good news that God's kingship is right beside you for the taking, and

- repent: turn your life round, turning from all known sin: especially, that of autonomy. Hand your life over

to Christ so that he, not yourself is your king.

– believe: knowing the facts, agreeing you need a saviour, surrender and ask him to save you.

As to our readiness, it is the testimony of even mature Christians that they find it helpful to have some models at their fingertips, even though the wooden use of them is to be avoided. A useful type of question is, 'If someone were to ask you, "What is a real Christian, what would you say?"' Not that the wording is the point, of course; but the esteem for the other, the ethos of shared exploration: these are of value.

Similarly the next question, 'Could we go through what the Bible says?' shares in addition the reverence for Scripture as the source of our knowledge about God and the fact that there is trustworthy content to impart.

Finally, to ensure that the Gospel has been understood, it is possible to vary the original question slightly: 'If a friend now asked you what it means to become a real Christian, what would you say?'

Many people want to come to Christ privately, so as to ensure it is their own authentic action and not something manipulated. But we are all different, and others value guidance and support through the process. Whether we help them or whether they prefer to speak to Christ privately, the essentials are surely that they address the Lord, tell him how sorry they are for their sins and thank him for his love in dying for them. Let them ask him to save them and let them hand their lives over to him, holding nothing back, and submit to him as Lord. It is good that they then tell some trustworthy Christian what they have done.

There are materials for such occasions, with some ground for the

new Christian to cover later on their own, especially, the area of assurance. SEAN (Study by Extension for All Nations), Scripture Union, the St Matthias Press and other publishers produce useful aids and there is value in finding material that you find natural. More important is a copy of the Bible along with your guidance on what to read and how to understand it.

A newborn Christian must be nurtured. At least the following should be included:

- fellowship in the church, both corporate worship and individual sharing of progress
- daily Bible reading, with guidance to make an interesting start
- prayer
- witness: an openness about being Christ's
- Christ's control: daily surrender followed by a sense of living with him and for him

Above all, it is the Holy Spirit who is the worker. There is something undeniably *given*, when he is at work. May he be the source of both our boldness and restraint—and of the wisdom which of the two to exercise on a given occasion. The Gospel is still the power of God for salvation and the Spirit is currently adding about 102,000 people a day to the church, world wide.⁷ We need not distrust his willingness to do the same among us. To quote Michael Green, three cheers for the Holy Spirit!

(By Peter White, Sandyford Memorial Church, Glasgow.)

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*don't lose your spiritual
edge out of inertia
or sheer exhaustion*



Ann Allen *meets* Elaine Duncan

The hectic pace of Elaine Duncan's life is reflected in the circumstances of this interview. There we were driving back from a week of 'Word Alive' at Skegness where we had been involved in the teaching team. Thoroughly exhausted but somewhat fortified by consuming a 'Full Monty' from the menu at the motorway restaurant, the following conversation ensued.

Ann: Elaine you are one of the few women to be used in a public role in evangelical Christian life in Scotland and beyond. How did it all begin?

Elaine: Scotland played a part away back at the beginning when I first became a Christian. I'd been brought up to know the gospel but it was at a concert in my early teens where the 'Heralds' from Charlotte Chapel were ministering that I first understood that being a Christian wasn't just believing

a set of facts; it was entering into a relationship based on these facts.

You had planned rather a different course for your life than the present one hadn't you?

Yes, I studied Behavioural Sciences and planned to work in psychology. A period of depression, triggered by head injuries after a car accident, helped me understand depression from the inside and I was initially launched on a career in that area. However UCCF called me to work in Scotland as a Travelling Secretary and I have been in full time Christian work ever since.

You saw some major changes in UCCF during your years in Scotland and Leicester.

During my years as Head of Colleges Department there was a merger of Universities and Colleges staff which resulted in staff covering smaller

geographic areas and this facilitated better more consistent relationships with more students. The differences between colleges and universities had already become blurred and are even more so today and there was added stimulation in working with a greater cross section of students.

You still enjoy being involved with students at many events.

The stimulation of students comes from the mixture of Christians and non Christians, the huge variety of questions they present at that stage in life, their different stages of spiritual growth and the need to keep one step ahead of them! That gives tremendous motivation to study, think and read. I have not really regretted never doing any formal theological study because on reflection UCCF did provide me with theological training in a quite unique way.

How would you assess Christian Student life in Britain today from your present perspective of working elsewhere?

Actually I don't think there is a great deal of difference in contemporary Christian Unions (CUs) from former days. Some CUs are hideaways which help Christians survive at University and others are marvellous evangelistic communities. CUs tend to reflect the state of the Church generally and their ups and downs are linked to the health of the Church. I do think that the present quality of teaching in CU meetings leaves something to be desired. The CUs no longer have recognised lists of speakers and so there is a huge difference in the approach and depth of some of the meetings. We do need strong contemporary helpful Bible expositors.

As Regional Activities Director for SU Scotland you have been involved in the launching of their latest Bible project 'Get Real'. Do the possibilities of that excite you?

Absolutely, because this is not just a Gospel distribution exercise. It provides Luke's Gospel to young people in an attractive magazine format which will encourage them not just to read it but to use it imaginatively in evangelism. We will measure the success of 'Get Real' not simply by the passing on of all the copies of Luke but by the numbers of young folk who read the Word for themselves and encounter Jesus Christ through it. It will be used at camps all through the summer and then there will be a major push in schools in the autumn.

Here we are returning from 'Word Alive' where the Bible is presented in a huge variety of different ways. You are involved in the planning of the event. What do you think it

contributes to the life of students and young people today?

Like many others I had experienced 'Spring Harvest' as a mixed blessing. However I am enthused about 'Word Alive' as an event within 'Spring Harvest' as it places more emphasis on Bible exposition at every level of the programme. In the student track it provides systematic Bible exposition, seminars on practical and contemporary issues, chronological and thematic major doctrinal themes are explored and an overview of how the Bible fits together is offered. It does help students to be grounded in scripture so much so that I suspect that there might have been a greater swing to new alternative Christian groupings in universities and colleges if 'Word Alive' had not existed. There has been a demise in major student conferences and there is a place for a national student event which is also part of an event for the whole Christian community of which the students are a part. I'm delighted that Roy Clements and his friends initiated and established the event.

Given the effort, time and energy the event takes to organise and run each year how do you think the Church benefits from it?

Through history God has used special events when his people come together for teaching and prayer. I think at 'Word Alive' individuals are strengthened in their faith, have a greater understanding of the Word and develop a deeper relationship with God. That in itself must make a difference back home in their local church. Some non-Christians profess faith as a result of the event. 'Word Alive' would never claim to be normative for the churches—it is a one off experience. We are told by some folk from struggling churches that it is their lifeline. Groups come together from

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*I think we have a lot more
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corporate leadership*

churches and find their fellowship enriched through a mutual shared experience. This year, one man brought sixty-seven people from seven different churches.

Special events are one of your fortes, Elaine, for you are a member of the Council responsible for the Keswick Convention and you participate in the programme. Given all of your leadership roles do you ever feel, as some women do, that you are the token woman there for gender balance?

Whatever the motives of those who originally drew me into these areas may have been, my experience would not bear that out. I find that the men I work with listen to and respect my views and that makes all the difference.

Here you are. God has given you gifts, strengths and abilities and you are using them in strategic Kingdom work. Why is it do you think that there are so few women alongside you in these roles?

I'm sad that there are so few. I believe that is a result of a very narrow and constricting view of ministry which has not given opportunities for people to grow and develop their gifts. Congregations should be places where people can find ways of serving which will help them develop and grow in giftedness.

Now the Jackpot question! Would that giftedness include women seeking ordination?

My understanding of Scripture is that there is male headship in the church and home. However I am not entirely certain that there is only one 'right way' in which that has to be worked out in Church life. For example I personally feel that leadership—spiritual leadership—can be

shared between men and women just as responsibility in family life is shared by husband and wife. I know of some evangelical churches where men and women share in very creative and successful team ministries. Final authority where it is needed should lie in the hands of a man. The views around women's ordination are important but are not core gospel issues. The bigger question we have to ask is whether we are willing to submit to God's authority rather than the authority of a man or a woman. That is why I am happy as a woman to teach the Bible as the authority lies solely in the Word, not in me. I think we have a lot more to discover about corporate leadership ...

...and on that note our conversation continued, lively enough to keep us awake for the rest of the journey. Wherever the Lord leads Elaine on her journey of faith with him she makes a significant contribution. She provides a role model of a woman who wrestles with the Word of God and seeks to apply its truths in a fresh and vigorous way to our contemporary society. Scotland and the wider world desperately need the influence of many more such women. Will the evangelical church foster and encourage them? Or not?

Book Reviews

Lord, find me a parking place!

Derek Wood

Leicester, IVP, 1995, 140pp, £4.99

ISBN 0 58110 880 6

Derek Wood, in the closing chapters of his book, describes himself as having 'picked up and examined a number of the pebbles of the Christian's life, and put them down again. Prayer, protection, peace of mind, healing, worship, guidance, Bible reading, forgiveness, service, worship, happiness...'. The book notes the trends and controversies connected with these 'pebbles', each in a short, self-contained chapter. At the same time, these fit into the book's overall theme of idolatry.

It is the author's argument that humans are naturally idol seeking, in that they work towards 'manipulating' Something/Someone greater than themselves out of fear and greed. Idolatry is age old; it is simply the idols which take on different disguises. While Christians claim to worship and serve God, he believes that often we too try to use the image we have of God for our own ends, to serve us.

The style is popular, and while the arguments and ideas are by no means simplistic, they would be easily understood by most Christians. There are a number of good, even humorous stories to illustrate the points. In a chapter on involvement in church life, for instance, the author introduces four characters who in different ways might be described as working for their salvation. In dealing with Bible reading, right and wrong approaches are described, and an interactive study is demonstrated. Thus the book would be especially relevant for young people or new Christians who need to come to terms with a more balanced Christian faith.

The book is also a timely challenge to more long-standing believers, in exposing idolatrous attitudes behind religiosity. For example, he shows great insight in his critique of fashionable retreats and conferences, and also on the fascination for the ministry of healing, while at the same time not being blind to their value. The chapters on guidance, and on guilt too are pastorally very wise.

Having examined the pebbles, the last couple of chapters summarise the issues clearly and point to a way forward. Prospective readers should not be put off by the somewhat dull cover of the book. Indeed, its title is a far better indicator of its liveliness.

Fiona Barnard, St Andrews

The Word for the World

Stephen Gaukroger

Leicester, Crossway Books, 1995, 117pp, £3.99

ISBN 1 85684 122 7

The Controversial Christ

Stephen Gaukroger

Leicester, Crossway Books, 1996, 137pp, £3.99

ISBN 1 85684 139 1

From the prolific pen of Stephen Gaukroger, these two books form part of a trilogy under the title 'Growing with John's Gospel'. The first book *The Word for the World* deals with chapters 1-6 of the Gospel, while *The Controversial Christ* deals with chapters 7-14. (Volume 3 *The Crucified King* was to be published late this year.)

These books introduce John's Gospel as 'an eye-witness account from someone who walked with Jesus, talked with him, sat down to evening meals with him and chatted over the events of the day with him'. We are then treated to an 'edited highlights' view of the gospel as the author picks out the important passages and events,

explains them and above all applies them to life and faith today.

Anyone looking for a detailed analysis of the complete text of John's Gospel will need to look elsewhere, but these books are ideal for the young Christian being introduced to John's record of Jesus for the first time. The biblical material is well-explained in language which is usually clear and uncomplicated. The lessons Jesus taught are then clearly applied to faith and life today. This is perhaps the book's main strength: the author is quick (too quick sometimes?) to apply the passage to the Christian in the 1990s.

Because this is an 'edited highlights' view, not every line of the Gospel is dealt with. There are even some surprising omissions: for example, no mention is made at all of the 'Bread of Life' sayings in chapter 6. Other aspects are dealt with sketchily: the author is often only able to state that some things are true without taking the time or space to elaborate and discuss any alternative points of view. That is inevitable when you set out to deal with John in this way.

However, these little books will be very useful: they will be useful for introducing young Christians to the Bible in general and to John in particular; busy preachers will find these books an easily-mined and often rich seam of illustrations and ways to apply John to Christians today.

James S. Dewar, Reay

The Masks of Melancholy: A Christian psychiatrist looks at depression and suicide

John White

Leicester, IVP, 1982, 252pp, £4.50

ISBN 0 85110 442 8

John White has put us in his debt by a wide-ranging discussion of depression

and suicide. The book is divided into four parts. Part one: Christianity and Mental Illness comprises three chapters: a discussion of the wide variety in types of depression; an examination of the relationship between sin and disease including the possibility of demonic involvement; and a brief discussion of the nature of mental illness.

The second part of the book, Science and the Masks, is composed of two chapters, dealing respectively with some of the tools available to the counsellor, mainly in the form of scales and questionnaires, and some of the many forms of depression and mania.

The third section discusses various theories about depression, takes a closer look at the marvels of the human brain, and, after pointing out that Christians rarely write about or discuss the subject, gives an analysis of various aspects of suicide, including a helpful look at the psychology of suicide.

The final section gives advice on coping with suicidal people and discusses various therapies. An epilogue attempts to dispel the pain and shame often involved in mental illness. The book has a nine-page glossary of technical terms, eleven pages of notes, and a two-page index.

Dr. White is not afraid to confess the failings of psychiatry, but remains convinced of the usefulness, and indeed necessity, of the profession. In the narrative sections the book is easy reading, but some parts get quite technical. Nevertheless ministers and others involved in counselling would find the book enlightening, even though only four pages are actually devoted to pastoral counselling.

Stanley Jebb, Dunstable

Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom

Leon Morris

Leicester, IVP, 1996, 191pp, £14.99
ISBN 0 85110 658 7

Leon Morris is one of the Western world's evangelical elder statesmen having served his generation and his Lord so magnificently. He is especially known for his debates with C.H. Dodd over the essential nature of the apostolic understanding of the death of Jesus. He has produced many scholarly works during the span of his long academic career. Now in his retirement he continues to write and his commentary on the letter to the Galatians is his latest work.

What strikes the reader immediately about this volume is that it is not written for the scholarly world, as Morris acknowledges in his forward, but for the church, the people of God. His concern is not to interact with the major theological issues that rage over the theology of the letter, but to present to the church his own personal understanding of the letter's significance for believers in the twentieth century.

The style adopted suits this goal perfectly. It is a relaxed style in which technicalities are kept to a minimum and which when they occur are handled with great gentleness. It would be easy for anyone who did not know the issues being strenuously debated to have the impression that theological thinking was an easy and straight forward matter. The approach is that of a father who sees little point in introducing his children to the problems of the big world when they can enjoy the certainties of the family's values and its security.

The book is ideal as an introduction to the text of the letter. Introductory matters of date and destination etc. are kept to a minimum and the gentle way

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in which these issues are handled is not likely to frighten many off reading the commentary on the letter itself. Throughout the commentary the heart of a pastor shines through.

Dr T. S. Holland, Bridgend

Acts

William J. Larkin Jr.

Leicester, IVP, 1995, 422pp, £9.99
ISBN 0 85111 680 9

This new commentary on Acts, written by an American Presbyterian minister (Presbyterian Church in America) teaching at Columbia Biblical Seminary in South Carolina, has much to commend it on several counts. Firstly, it is good value for money, and IVP are to be congratulated for keeping a substantial hardback volume under £10.

Secondly, it provides very useful information on the history and text of Acts. Larkin's work is somewhat less technical than, for example, Howard Marshall's Tyndale commentary which is primarily exegetical and includes significant interaction with critical scholarship for the benefit of students; Larkin is writing with preachers, and their particular needs, in mind. Having said this, Larkin still includes numerous informative footnotes which explain historical and linguistic issues and which point the reader to further secondary literature. The twenty-nine page bibliography is comprehensive enough to keep the most industrious undergraduate busy for a long time.

Thirdly, one particularly valuable element in this commentary is the extended discussion of the theological themes which are found in Acts. This provides a useful framework for using the more detailed exegesis in the commentary.

Fourthly, the exposition is contemporary, in that it raises and discusses important issues such as

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religious pluralism and mission strategy for 'creative access nations'. (These two examples indicate the healthy concern for mission demonstrated by the author of the commentary.)

Larkin writes clearly and with a reasonable sense of flow (given the constraints of the traditional commentary form). The biblical text is not included except for occasional phrases in the body of the commentary. This has a positive side in that you are paying for true commentary, not a biblical text which you already have. However, the negative side is a little less convenience if you are not sitting at a desk.

Overall this is a valuable commentary on Acts with a refreshing blend of historical perspective and contemporary application.

Rev'd Alistair Wilson, Inverness

Look to the Rock. An Old Testament Background to our Understanding of Christ

Alec Motyer

Leicester, IVP, 1996, 255pp, £9.99
ISBN 0 85111 168 8

In this book of mainly OT themes Motyer unashamedly points up the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he regards as the substance, centre and climax of all Scripture.

The theme of chapter 2 is the OT monarchy, disappointment with which provided 'the seed bed of hope' concerning an ideal, messianic figure of the future. This Davidic motif is linked to an Adamic one (2 Sam. 7:12 and Gen. 3:15), and also to the enigmatic Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-21, Ps. 110), before each is applied to Jesus who is 'Son of David and Son of God ... the second Adam who will reign in the restored Eden and the promised Melchizedek Priest-King' (p/ 38).

In chapter 3 the theme of covenant is traced through its several OT forms

to its climax in Jesus, not least because of his 'better' sacrifice (cf. Heb. 9). Motyer is careful to point out that in the OT no less than in the NT grace always precedes law, even in Eden.

Christ as the ultimate revelation of God is the subject of the next two chapters in which the two OT 'images' of God, Man and the Law, are seen to come together in the life of obedience (p. 77) exemplified perfectly by Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Chapters 6 and 7 trace the development of the themes of sin and death which find their answer in 'Christ our Life', while the concluding chapter, 'Christ our Hope', draws parallels between the themes of creation and consummation.

One might quibble with occasional points of interpretation, e.g. I suspect that the view of the monarchy portrayed in Judges is more ambivalent than Motyer suggests (p. 25). That, however, does not detract from the richness of this study which is not one for beginners but will prove to be a sheer delight to those already reasonably familiar with the OT.

This book will go some way in helping to remedy the situation bemoaned by Motyer in the Introduction that 'we belong to a generation which has lost its grip on the Old Testament'. Theological students, preachers, leaders of bible study groups and many 'ordinary' Christians will benefit immensely from careful study of its contents.

Hector Morrison, Inverness

Paying Attention to People

Vernon White

London, SPCK, 1996, 199pp, £10.99
ISBN 0 281 04988 2

Paying Attention to People is, in the author's own words, 'an essay in ideas and beliefs' which attempts 'to trace connections (and collisions) between

prevailing ideas of individualism and Christian doctrine'. Vernon White offers us a specifically Christian evaluation of individualism in a way which takes seriously the prevailing social and intellectual climate of the West.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I provides a brief analysis of individualism, both from an historical and a conceptual perspective. It offers an evaluation of the current notions of individualism, concluding that the core ideas of modern individualism are profoundly ambivalent. This section of the book then continues with a discussion of definitions of personhood, and a critique of the modern concept of individuality which arises 'from a particular and entirely inadequate assumption about how the individual is formed: namely as self-originating in all his or her most significant characteristics.' Instead, White argues for a relational understanding of individuality as a counteraction to the disintegrative individualism of the West. This first section ends with an indication of how these general conclusions might affect the Church's practical interaction with contemporary society.

Part II of the book begins the specifically Christian evaluation of the individual, and seeks to set out a credible ontological basis for any discussion of individualism. White cogently argues that without any specific appeal to theology 'the sort of ontological stability which could be constructed for individual persons seems strictly limited.' He then proceeds to set out the parameters and constituent parts of such an ontology, which, by the nature of the case, must be rooted in the Trinity's self revelation of Persons-in-communion. Trinitarian relationships, creation, incarnation, redemption, resurrection and

eschatology are all examined with regard to their pertinency for our understanding of the individual. The argumentation of this second part of the book ends with a discussion of the logic of divine love, showing that the Christian revelation of agapé both preserves true individual identity and meaning, and provides the basis for true community in which that individuality and personal meaning are fulfilled.

The closing chapter of the book sets out the parameters and presumptions (i.e. 'middle axioms') which arise from the foregoing discussion. They point the way to practical implications (particularly in the areas of social priorities, employment, the care of the elderly and marriage) to be commended to a confused society.

This book is well written, well researched (with a valuable bibliography and detailed footnotes) and well argued. It presents a powerful case for Christian belief as a 'continuing bulwark against moral disintegration'. It presents this case energetically within the contemporary framework of ideas in which confused notions of the individual are bringing enormous social dislocation.

As a work essentially concerned to address fundamental philosophical and theological issues of personhood it succeeds wonderfully. But White himself admits that this theoretical approach does not leave scope for detailed evaluation of social practice. The book's value lies not in its immediate 'off the shelf' applicability, but in its stimulus to clear and critical Christian thinking about one of the key issues of our day. I found the book both stimulating and demanding. It provides a thoughtful theoretical base for the development of much practical theology, and alerts us to the origins

of much of the social devastation we encounter day by day.

Noel Due, Inverness

Euthanasia: A Christian

Evaluation

H. Jochemsen

Oxford, Latimer House, 1995, 38pp, £2.00

ISBN 0 946307 45 8

This slim volume is one of a useful series of monographs on theological and social issues of topical concern edited by the Theological Work Group of Latimer House, Oxford. In only 7 short sections the author sketches the historical, semantic, and cultural background of the subject, presents both a secular and a Christian perspective, and brings rational and reasonable discussion to a debate which so often degenerates into emotion and confrontation. The secularisation of attitudes to personhood, health, death and medicine is identified as the underlying philosophy of the euthanasia movement and it is, I believe, essential that the Christian should grasp this before entering into debate on the more sociological issues. The logic of the opposing sides of the argument is examined in relation to the starting point of the Christian and the non-Christian and it is made clear that the basic differences lie in our relationship to God, rather than in views about mortality, morality or medicine. This is one of the most concise publications on the subject and to write more about it would do despite to that very conciseness. It does not take long to read the 38 pages and, after doing so, the reader undoubtedly will be much better informed.

Dr George Chalmers, Glasgow

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Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995, 268pp, £12 95

ISBN 0 85 15 1 683 1

Why should I buy another volume of sermons by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones?

This book of evangelistic sermons should find a place on any preacher's shelf. Lloyd-Jones always considered himself to be an evangelist, and spent considerable time exercising this ministry. In these days we have a great need to recover our confidence in evangelistic preaching. In studying these sermons we will see Lloyd-Jones beginning with his text but quickly moving in beside those hearing the sermon; by persistent questioning, sometimes as many as ten questions in one series, by use of familiar address he draws the hearers (and readers) into the dynamic of the Word. By restrained use of the second person Lloyd-Jones manages to create an impact with those hearing such sermons. If we need to preach evangelistically, and if we need guidance in how to preach evangelistically—and clearly we do—then this book will help us.

Reading these sermons we are shown how the Old Testament is being relived in our age. Man has not changed, and God's purposes for man have not changed. The Old Testament has a special ability to lay the sinner low. Lloyd-Jones then effortlessly moves us close to Christ. We need to recapture this confidence in the unity of Scripture and begin again to use all Scripture to bring needy sinners to the cross. By example this book will inspire us and help us in this task.

This book would be profitable to study alone or in a reading group. But, if used effectively, it will result in much evangelistic preaching making use of

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the whole Word of God.

Gordon Kennedy, New Cumnock

Episcopal Oversight—A Case for Reform

D.R.J. Holloway

Oxford, Latimer House, 1994, 60pp, £2.00

ISBN 0 946 307 44X

Anyone who knows of Jesmond Parish Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne, will be aware of the highly successful ministry there of David Holloway, Vicar for the last 24 years. Mr Holloway has also gained quite a reputation, both in the wider church and in the media, for his outspoken defence of evangelical beliefs and ethics.

Since the war, the Church of England has seen many changes—for instance, in worship, the Book of Common Prayer having effectively been replaced by the Alternative Service Book, or in church government (synodical) or in parish structure and so on. One aspect of the Church of England which has not changed radically, however, other than having gained power, is episcopacy. David Holloway and many evangelicals are anxious to correct this and reform it, taking it away from prelacy.

'Episcopal oversight', the third Latimer lecture delivered in Oxford in 1994 and in Durham the same year, (fully annotated with six appendices and a postscript on the current method of appointing bishops) is more concerned with surveying the rough terrain as it is, rather than being too specific in proposals for change. (One does get the impression, however, that a bishop's office is proposed to be rather like that of the Vicar of Jesmond as it now is!) One thing is clear—a bishop is intended to be one who fulfils the job description of Canon C18—'to teach and uphold sound and

wholesome doctrine, and to...drive away all erroneous and strange opinions.'

He is to be a preacher and teacher of the Word of God, preferably the minister of a large central church able to help smaller churches to grow. The office has become that of an administrator, an episcopal bureaucrat cluttered up with a plethora of diocesan affairs—in fact, a deacon.

Holloway sees the reformed bishop as being rather more than a Church of Scotland parish minister who is only one of several elders. He wants ultimate authority to be in the hands of a person rather than a committee which turns out, in his view, to be the case in Presbyterianism. He is to be of the 'bene esse' of the church but not regarded as of the 'esse' which is widespread thinking in the contemporary Anglican church. Moreover, too often the wrong people are appointed to the office of bishop in defiance of Canon C18. As with all Christian leadership, David Holloway would have episcopacy to be within the boundaries of the definition by the National Evangelical Congress of 1971—'leadership in the church should be plural and mixed, ultimate responsibility normally singular and male.'

Peter Cook, Cheadle Hulme

Arguing with God: The Problem of Evil

Hugh Silvester

Leicester, IVP, 1971, 1996, 128pp, £1.99

ISBN 0 85111 236

This book, reprinted in IVP's Christian Classics Series, is a challenging read addressing one of the most difficult subjects Christians face: How do we reconcile belief in a loving God with the existence of so much evil in the world?

Before advancing the theodicy he is prepared to defend, Silvester clarifies terms; contrasting subjective and objective ideas of what is 'good', and moral and natural evil. He states the problem clearly and examines various unsatisfactory solutions, which deny either the goodness or omnipotence of God, or the existence of evil. He argues persuasively in favour of what he calls 'The Free Will Defence', that mankind was created with the ability to rebel against God. 'Without the freedom to choose, there can be no true love' (p.60). He suggests that the Bible's doctrine of judgement only makes sense if man is responsible for his actions. Silvester seeks to answer some of the objections raised against his theory before examining its implications for the person who resists God's demands and his love. Vitally, he points us to Christ, in whom God gave of himself and faced the full impact of evil, that he might save us from its power. The concluding chapters take us beyond theory, with practical advice for the Christian facing suffering, and a reminder that things will become clearer in the light of eternity.

A brief outline cannot do justice to the detailed argument of the book, which forces both the Christian reader and the sceptic to face equally awkward questions. Silvester seeks at all times to be faithful to Scripture, and is honest about those occasions when he is speculating beyond what the Bible says. Some of his illustrations have lost their topicality, as is understandable in a book written 25 years ago, and the current generation will find a reference to 'idiot children' (p.29) offensive. However, these are minor criticisms of what is an excellent contribution to the debate on a perennial 'hot potato' especially in the student world.

Tony Fowler, Paisley